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A
CHANGE
OF
FACE

BY
THOMAS
COBB

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BY

THOMAS COBB

AUTHOR OF

"THE INTRIGUERS" "THE COMPOSITE LADY"
ETC. ETC.

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CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. EVANGELINE	I
II. A SHOCK FOR WILMOT	14
III. DAYS OF PROBATION.	31
IV. KILLING TIME	47
V. MRS. OPPENSHAW	57
VI. A REACTION	71
VII. GOOD-BYE	84
VIII. TRIMINGSLEY.	99
IX. OWEN FAIRBANK	115
X. A HINT FOR OWEN	132
XI. CONFIDENCES.	146
XII. THE RETURN TO LONDON	160
XIII. WILMOT REAPPEARS	172
XIV. AN AMENDE	183
XV. THE SECOND PARTING	197
XVI. BAD NEWS	208
XVII. NEWS!	218
XVIII. AT SOUTHAMPTON	230
XIX. A REVOLUTION	241
XX. AT BOURNEMOUTH	253
XXI. EXPLANATIONS	267
XXII. OWEN GOES AWAY	283
XXIII. THE RETURN OF OWEN	295

A CHANGE OF FACE

CHAPTER I

EVANGELINE

THE transformation would have seemed more comprehensible, more natural, if it had been accompanied by any sensations of weakness, but never having felt stronger or better during the twenty-two years of her life, Evangeline found it extremely difficult to put aside the superstitious notion that some occult and malign influence had been exerted over her—certainly at a very inconvenient time.

When it had been a satisfaction to look in the glass, she had perhaps never stood quite so long before it as she had done since the beginning of the present week in June. Her face now possessed an uncanny fascination for herself if for none besides, and she found it hard to realise that it had ever been attractive, or that it could ever by any possibility cease to look grotesque. It was

true that in complete repose the change became a little less noticeable, but animation and vivacity had hitherto certainly not been amongst the slightest of her charms, and she had owed as much to expression as to the regularity of her features. Now, however, even when she constrained herself to remain silent and grave, the right side of her face appeared curiously smooth and expressionless, the eyelid drooped, and when she made the faintest attempt to smile the features went pitifully askew, reminding her of a gargoyle which she had seen on some ancient church three or four years ago in Brittany.

She assured herself that her one talent was lost, for the present at least, and that for the great majority of her acquaintances she no longer possessed the remotest attractiveness. Evangeline began to realise that all her eggs, as it were, had been put into one basket: hostesses had been in the habit of engaging her for their parties a long time in advance, as if she were a popular artiste; men had done homage to her charms; and although she was by no means a great heiress, she had, before the appearance of Wilmot Norgate on the scene, been offered an extensive and desirable choice of husbands.

Even her father had found it entirely beyond his power to refrain from laughter when she

came down to breakfast (a little later than usual) on that dreadful morning, although the next minute Evangeline had been seated on his knees, while he spared no effort to soothe and caress her as if she were once more a small child. Wilmot Norgate would not laugh at her, even for the fraction of a second, she felt confident; but whilst counting with the utmost assurance on his warmest sympathy, Evangeline would eagerly have given tithes of all she possessed on the consideration that she might look her very best on her wedding-day a fortnight hence; and for that matter, encouraged to hope as she had been by Dr. Weston, she fervently trusted that she might look her best even yet.

If only she had been able to foresee the disaster she would doubtless have turned deaf ears to Wilmot's entreaties and have insisted on naming a later date; but her lover having been extremely urgent, and Evangeline blissfully ignorant of the future, she had pretended to no great reluctance to gratify him in this regard as in every other. Many times, if but half sincerely, she had tried to laugh away the lavish encomiums which Wilmot had bestowed upon her in his ardour; and now she remembered with minute distinctness a conversation to the point, which had beguiled a spare half-hour about a week ago.

"Some day," she urged, when he had been more than usually insistent, "it is absolutely certain that such beauty as I have will fade, and I wonder what you will find to say then?"

"To me," Wilmot assured her, "it is impossible to conceive that you can ever be other than beautiful."

"But try to exercise your imagination," Evangeline persisted, "and suppose that I were not!"

"Upon my word I don't see why I should torment myself by going behind the delightful fact that you are," he exclaimed.

"It seems as if you had been foolish enough to build your house on sand," she answered, half-smiling, half-sighing. "Besides," she added, "can't you understand that I wish to be loved just for myself?"

"Why, of course, for what else?" demanded Wilmot, with a laugh.

"Ah yes," said Evangeline, "but I mean not merely for the outward husk of me."

"You must try to remember," he urged gaily, "that it is my only guide to that within which passes show, and I can assure you it is the only guide I require."

"Do you really believe it is a guide at all?" she asked, with a sigh.

"Who is it that says nature understands her

business far too well not to make a practice of putting her best goods into the best cases?"

"Still," she retorted, "you must admit that I know a great many women, and I am certain that the very best of them all is the plainest."

"There," cried Wilmot, "I can boast of a distinct advantage over you, for the very best woman I have ever known, ever expect to know, or even wish to know, is without question the most beautiful."

"I am too stupid to express my meaning properly," said Evangeline. "But surely you see there must be something behind the form,—you may call it the soul, the spirit, or whatever you please, but something that is more essentially myself? And while one's outer part, unfortunately, cannot fail to grow worse with time, that other—whatever it may be—ought to become more and more perfect. I feel I should like you to love me for what will last the longest."

Wilmot eloquently protested that he loved her (as no man had ever adored a woman until now!) for the totality of herself; that his most ardent hope in life was shortly to take her for better, for worse, convinced that it could not fail to be for better; that happen what might, his love would ever endure; and it must be admitted that Wilmot Norgate meant every word he said.

He gratified her by the reiterated assurance that her physical perfection was, in his eyes, as nothing compared with her moral excellence, although perhaps it was the first time he had been able to regard a woman from this point of view. But it had been forced upon him, in a manner, by Evangeline herself, with whom it was impossible to be brought into intimate contact without catching something of her spirit.

She was, he ardently assured himself (and one or two more or less patient listeners) in his world without being of it; she needs must love the highest when she saw it: the conviction of this fact causing him indeed to marvel that she should nevertheless have found it possible to love himself sufficiently well to promise to be his wife. And yet he did not feel the slightest doubt that she loved him! When once the promise had been given Evangeline's demeanour suddenly changed, Wilmot was admitted to a rare and delightful intimacy, of which he might have felt more unworthy, but that he determined, in the future at least, to deserve his great good fortune.

Remembering that somewhat sentimental conversation of a week ago, Evangeline derived from the reminiscence a satisfaction which yet she assured herself again and again could scarcely be needed. She complacently measured Wilmot Norgate's corn

by her own bushel, it being the fashion to judge men and women by the same standard nowadays. No conceivable misfortune, transient or perpetual, trivial or grave, could weaken in the faintest degree her own regard for Wilmot, and why should she have the arrogance to esteem him more lightly than herself?

She thought of his ardent petition a month or so ago, when she had at first suggested August for their union; and although it seemed that she had now a more than sufficient cause to postpone the day, she determined at some cost to herself still to put his wishes before her own, to let the marriage take place, as had already been arranged, on the twenty-fifth of the present month.

It was only Evangeline's firm insistence on his filial duty which had compelled Wilmot reluctantly to leave London the previous Friday; but his parents were old-fashioned, stay-at-home folk, and it could not be said that he had very energetically tried to persuade them to break through the habit of years in order to come to London for the ceremony. Evangeline, however, had insisted that duty necessitated a kind of farewell visit to Devonshire, and she expected to see him immediately on his return from the country this Thursday evening.

Wilmot Norgate was ten years older than Evangeline, and therefore in the thirty-second year

of his age. He owed the introduction to his old friend Mrs. Oppenshaw, who had lived for a great many years in Green Street, Park Lane, and had taken a kind of grand-motherly interest in him even when Wilmot was a small boy.

At Mrs. Oppenshaw's death, no doubt, Wilmot Norgate's already very ample fortune would be materially increased, and whilst she rather prided herself on being a woman of the world, and she was certainly by no means extremely exacting, she had been forced to the conclusion that the time had come when Wilmot ought seriously to consider the desirability of mending his ways. Mrs. Oppenshaw was disposed to regard marriage as a kind of panacea; and although Wilmot made a grimace at the bare suggestion of the remedy, she seized the opportunity to bring him and Evangeline Maitland together in her drawing-room.

In spite of his protestations and his considerable experience of women, it was, on Wilmot Norgate's part at least, a case of love at first sight. He admitted to Mrs. Oppenshaw the next day that Evangeline was without exception the most fascinating girl he had ever seen, and falling readily into his old friend's humour, from that time he lost no opportunity of meeting Evangeline as often as circumstances permitted.

His former avocations began to lose much of

their interest, and Mrs. Oppenshaw rejoiced to learn (in a somewhat roundabout manner) that the entanglement to which she had taken objection had come to an abrupt end. Wilmot would be a monk because, perhaps, he was sick for love! He easily succeeded in obtaining an introduction to Mr. Maitland, his suit seemed to prosper, and Wilmot found himself breathing a fresher and purer atmosphere than he had been accustomed to for some time; after a suitable interval he put his fate to the touch, and subsequently a ring upon Evangeline's finger; the wedding-day in due course was named; and then, almost at the latest moment, Wilmot had been induced to pay this rather troublesome farewell visit to his own people in Devonshire.

On the Thursday morning of his return to London he received Evangeline's customary daily letter, and the first few lines were sufficient to fill him with alarm. When he read that she was not quite so well as usual his anxiety knew no limit. Dr. Weston, the family physician, declared that she had "taken a severe chill," probably on coming out of the warm church on Sunday evening into a temperature which was almost unprecedentedly low for June. But reading a few more lines of Evangeline's letter, Wilmot became slightly less apprehensive as he began to grasp

the fact that the "chill" had affected only some of the nerves in her face.

"The doctor tells me," she wrote, "that I have a rather bad attack of facial paralysis. Even my father could not help laughing when he saw me, and I ought to warn you that I look positively hideous."

Her description of the ailment gave Wilmot no very definite impression, and certainly he had not the remotest suspicion of its actual significance. He was able to smile at the suggestion that Evangeline could, in any circumstances, look "positively hideous"; and although it seemed that he must imagine some trivial, temporary blemish, he found it entirely impossible to conceive the necessity for any warning such as that which was conveyed in her letter.

But he found no difficulty in understanding the sensitiveness which led her into exaggeration, being indeed personally not a little particular concerning his appearance. Everybody declared that he and Evangeline would make an exceptionally handsome and distinguished-looking couple, and he no more questioned the value of his own contribution than of hers. As Evangeline was radiantly fair, it seemed fitting that Wilmot should have black hair; and as she was "all womanly," that he should be tall, broad-shouldered and erect. He

wore a moustache which even fashion could not induce him to part with, and he invariably dressed with the utmost care.

Wilmot had given his mother the most enthusiastic accounts of Evangeline, exhibiting eight or nine photographs, brought from London for the purpose, in different attitudes and dresses. He could bring himself to talk of little besides his bride, so that Mrs. Norgate found it difficult to secure an opening to give her son a satisfactory history of her own and her husband's numerous ailments.

Wilmot rejoiced exceedingly when the hour came to set forth to the railway station, and during the journey to London his thoughts dwelt continuously on the bliss of seeing Evangeline again in a few hours, and of spending the rest of his life by her side. He was disposed to ignore the warning contained in her letter, while he looked forward to the approaching meeting with all the rapture of a lover within a week or two of his wedding-day. Henceforth they need not be separated for a whole day until they were indissolubly united on the twenty-fifth of the present month.

On alighting at last at the London terminus, Wilmot found that it was too late to attempt a visit to Mr. Maitland's house in Portman Square before dinner, for he would not, in spite of his

impatience, have dreamed of presenting himself to Evangeline without removing the stains of his journey. Taking a cab to the rooms in Mount Street where he had lived for the last two or three years, he had a bath, changed into his evening clothes, then set forth again and took another hansom to his club in Pall Mall, where he hastily dined.

It was about a quarter to nine o'clock when he eventually reached Mr. Maitland's door.

"Miss Maitland?" he inquired of the butler who opened it.

"I will tell Miss Maitland, sir," was the answer; and Wilmot concluded from the peculiar hesitancy of the man's manner that probably Evangeline had not quite finished dinner. Taking off his thin overcoat and hat, Wilmot left them in the hall as usual and accompanied the butler upstairs to the drawing-room, where some of the pleasantest half-hours of his life had been passed; where he had asked Evangeline to be his wife and she with delightful frankness had consented.

The room still seemed to be pervaded by her influence, and he thought of Evangeline even while he examined his white necktie in one of the mirrors. He was living in a kind of glamour which might be justified by his early expectations. Becoming a little impatient, as a few minutes went

by without any sign of her, Wilmot walked to a small table and took in his hand one of Evangeline's most recent photographs; he was gazing at this, longing to clasp the original in his arms again, when, after what appeared to be an interminable interval, Evangeline opened the door.

CHAPTER II

A SHOCK FOR WILMOT

AS the handle turned, Wilmot replaced the cabinet photograph on the table, and stepped quickly forward with his arms extended, prepared to assert a lover's prerogative; but the next instant, when the door was opened more widely and Evangeline entered the drawing-room, he came to an abrupt standstill.

With a discreet, if rather painful, sense that she must on no account do anything which might attract attention to herself, Evangeline had taken the precaution to put on one of her simplest frocks this evening—a thin, black dress, slightly open at the throat; and having discarded the odious bandage which under the doctor's orders had recently enveloped her face, she warned herself to maintain a judiciously grave expression.

But sheer gladness at the sight of Wilmot after their short separation, caused her to forget every precaution, and although she had walked slowly, a little timorously, downstairs, hesitating before she

could summon sufficient courage to enter the room, when once she touched the handle she pushed the door impulsively open, and came into his presence with an exclamation of pleasure on her lips. Then, his abrupt change of demeanour serving to recall her infirmity, Evangeline raised her right hand as if to hide her cheek.

For what seemed a long time, although only a few seconds could have passed, the two remained apart, alike overcome by something of embarrassment; but whilst Wilmot stood entirely dumbfounded, unable to speak or even to think clearly, Evangeline, even in the midst of her exceedingly bitter disappointment, already began to make excuses for the man she loved, but who certainly at this critical moment did not look as if he lavished any superabundant affection upon her in return.

"You received my letter this morning?" she murmured presently.

"Yes, I—I got your letter all right," answered Wilmot, still quite incapable of self-control.

"You must remember I—I tried to warn you what to expect," she exclaimed.

"I can't pretend that I—that I anticipated anything—anything approaching——"

"But you will admit I told you the simple truth," she insisted. "I said I looked perfectly

hideous. I explained what had happened to me," she added, still holding her right hand over her cheek.

"I—I had no idea——"

"How strictly I kept to the truth!" she answered. "You allowed yourself to believe that I exaggerated"; and drawing closer, she took his hand, half raising her face for the anticipated caress.

But although Evangeline had never in her life yearned for sympathy as she yearned for it now, it became impossible any longer to resist the intolerable suspicion that Wilmot shrank from her. She credited him, rather painfully, with an effort to hide his feelings, but at least it was obvious that he could not succeed in behaving as if nothing out of the common had occurred. For once he showed anything rather than an overweening impatience to take her in his arms, and the result was that Evangeline grew conscious of a sense of something approaching desolation.

While she had complained, before to-day, of his too passionate demeanour, this had not been entirely unpleasant; it had been indeed delightful to realise the full extent of his fascination, and she had felt disposed to revel in a sense of power. But this evening Wilmot seemed to be completely staggered, and it was appalling to suspect that she had become, even temporarily, less than agreeable

to him. As if with a greater effort he pressed her hand, and stooping kissed her perfunctorily—on the forehead.

Shuddering slightly, Evangeline raised a pair of wistful eyes.

"It may all go away in less than a week," she faltered. "Perhaps in a day or two. Dr. Weston insists that it is nothing."

"Nothing!" exclaimed Wilmot.

"Like a stiff neck, or some other absurd thing, which makes one look ridiculous just for the time but leaves no traces behind it. You managed after all to enjoy your visit?" she added, with an endeavour to thrust the distressing topic aside, though she perceived that Wilmot could not keep his eyes from her face.

"Nothing could easily have been much less interesting," he returned. "The journey back to London was the only part I cared for."

While he spoke, Evangeline turned her back towards him as she walked to a chair; and the instant her face was hidden some of Wilmot's customary enthusiasm seemed to return. Her shape remained superb, and with her left, comparatively undisfigured, cheek presented, his own Evangeline (as he phrased it) appeared to have come again. Drawing closer, Wilmot placed an arm about her body, while she, as yet incom-

pletely schooled to her fresh conditions, impulsively turned a face which should have been consummately beautiful. He found it hard to repress a groan as he gazed into her eyes, and his arm dropped to his side as if she had been suddenly bewitched.

Mrs. Oppenshaw always assured herself that the redeeming traits of Wilmot Norgate's character were generosity and unselfishness, because perhaps he had a habit of giving away what he did not value. But in the present emergency his own disappointment was far too painfully acute to permit him to think for a moment of Evangeline's. Indeed, he felt very much inclined, in a manner, to blame her for the severe loss which she had brought upon him.

"And now," cried Evangeline, as she sat down, "I am sure you must wish very sincerely that you had stayed in Devonshire a little longer. By the bye," she continued, "I hope you explained it was I who compelled you to go. I should like to stand well with your people, you know. I can't tell you how many fresh presents have come since you left London," she exclaimed, seeing that Wilmot was too much pre-occupied to respond.

He glanced around the room, however, and noticed that the number of wedding-presents had increased considerably since his departure, and

presently, when Evangeline rose from her chair and began to handle some of them, Wilmot made a great effort to appear interested, stealing occasional glances at her face with an endeavour to convince himself that she was in truth Evangeline. A few minutes later the door opened again, and with a breath of relief, by no means unperceived by her, Wilmot turned to confront Mr. Maitland.

As Wilmot took her father's hand, Evangeline ran impulsively forwards, clinging to Mr. Maitland's arm, and hanging upon it as if she felt thankful to be again in the presence of sympathy. A rare comradeship had grown up between the father and daughter, since Mrs. Maitland's death about five years ago had left them alone together. He had retired from his practice at the bar at that time, and refused a police magistracy, feeling in the freshness of his grief that he could never again muster sufficient energy for any active occupation. Even now, after five years had passed, his manner still created an impression of listlessness, and he was prone to spend many hours over a book in his arm-chair unless Evangeline insisted on routing him out.

Although he had lately passed his fiftieth year, Mr. Maitland still held himself as erect as ever; he was tall, as you would naturally have expected Evangeline's father to be, although, unlike hers, Mr.

Maitland's hair had been dark until it became slightly grizzled. His face had a somewhat exceptional appearance, because although he had grown a short closely-trimmed beard, he still continued to shave his upper lip. Nevertheless Evangeline regarded her father (always with the exception of Wilmot Norgate) as by far the most distinguished-looking man she knew, and he had not increased half a stone in weight within her memory.

Mr. Maitland had not been many minutes in the drawing-room before he became conscious of the strained situation. It was not possible to resist the conclusion that there was embarrassment in the air, and while Wilmot answered his formal inquiries concerning the visit to Devonshire, and discussed the various wedding-presents, it soon became obvious that he took very little interest in what passed. At first Mr. Maitland attempted to bring about a more satisfactory condition of things, but becoming oppressed by the atmosphere of unusual constraint, he gave up the task and suggested that Evangeline should return to her own room.

"If you wish to get all right again quickly," he said, "you must obey your doctor's orders, and Weston insisted that you ought to keep your face covered as much as possible."

"I certainly do wish to get well again quickly,"

she exclaimed, trying to force a smile, which only made her disfigurement the more perceptible. Then, after a moment's hesitation, she held out her hand to Wilmot.

"Are you really going? Shan't I see you again?" he asked perfunctorily.

"I daresay I shall be visible when you come to-morrow," she answered, but it was quite impossible to feel satisfied that a more affectionate leave-taking was prevented only by Mr. Maitland's presence. As Evangeline quitted the room, she reminded herself that this was the first time she had parted from Wilmot without an embrace since the day she promised to be his wife.

"Come downstairs and smoke," suggested Mr. Maitland, rather abruptly, when Evangeline had gone, and re-opening the door he took Wilmot to the smoking-room on the ground floor; the most comfortable room in the house, as Evangeline often told her father, with its thick Turkey carpet, its heavy curtains saturated with the odour of tobacco, its warmly tinted walls and capacious arm-chairs. Switching on the electric light as he entered, Mr. Maitland opened his cigar cabinet, and drew out one of its drawers, while Wilmot Norgate stood staring dismally at the fireplace, with his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets.

"Good God!" he exclaimed as if he were alone, but the next moment he became conscious of the pressure of a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"Of course, I am quite able to understand that it's a bit of a shock for you," said Mr. Maitland in a pacificatory tone.

"Upon my soul!" cried Wilmot, "I don't seem able to understand anything very clearly. The thing is almost inconceivable."

"Still," urged Mr. Maitland, "facts have to be faced, you know, however tiresome they may be." Stepping forward he placed the drawer full of cigars on the leather-topped, black oak writing-table. "After all," he added, "it isn't much use to make a mountain out of a molehill. In a very few days—a week at the outside—I hope to see Evangeline looking quite like herself again."

"I—I can't grasp the possibility!" muttered Wilmot.

The two men stood a yard apart; Wilmot with a haggard, unhappy expression on his face, Mr. Maitland continuing to observe him with a steady gaze, while he spoke in a low, measured tone.

"Surely," he suggested, "you're not tormenting yourself by the fear that Evangeline is doomed to remain in this condition for ever."

"The great difficulty is to make myself believe that she isn't someone else," was the gloomy answer.

Mr. Maitland put forth his hand to take a cigar from the drawer, selecting it with unusual care and then cutting off the tip with extreme deliberation.

"My dear fellow," he said, not without a slight break in his voice, "she is the same dear girl as when she bade you good-bye less than a week ago."

"But—good Heavens!—what a terrible transformation! Enough to drive a man mad to think of it."

"Well, then, try not to think of it," Mr. Maitland returned. "Try to take a more cheerful view."

He lifted the drawer from the table, and held it towards Wilmot, who stared into it for a few moments before selecting a cigar. Turning to the mantelshelf, Mr. Maitland took a match, struck it and held it in his hand while his guest obtained a light.

"Sit down and help yourself to whisky," he urged; and taking a chair, Wilmot leaned back, clasping his hands behind his neck as he gazed blankly up at the ceiling.

"No whisky, thanks," he muttered.

"I want to convince you," Mr. Maitland continued, "that there is every reason to hope Evangeline will be all right again by the twenty-fifth of this month."

"I wish to goodness I could make myself believe it," answered Wilmot, "but upon my word it is difficult."

"I have known Dr. Weston a good many years," said Mr. Maitland, "and I have perfect confidence in his opinion. He insists that the disfigurement may go away as suddenly as it came about."

Wilmot's expression struck him as being unpleasantly sceptical, and if Mr. Maitland could have consulted only his own inclination he would probably have adopted a vastly different tone. With a considerable effort, however, he reminded himself of the necessity, for Evangeline's sake, of self-control. But it seemed to him that his daughter was the person chiefly to be commiserated, although Norgate ignored entirely her feelings on the subject, looking and speaking as if his own were the only grievance.

"I looked in at the house as I was passing yesterday," said Mr. Maitland, thinking it safer to try a different tack. "Things seem to be getting into something like order ; the men were laying the carpets."

After a great deal of driving about the West End of London in hansom cabs, after many fruitless inspections, a house had been taken in South Audley Street, propinquity to Portman Square being, in Evangeline's opinion, not the least of its advantages. She had subsequently devoted delightful hours to the selection of its furniture; and had never undertaken a more agreeable task. Wilmot had given her *carte blanche*; he appeared to have no will of his own, he approved of everything Evangeline desired, and she flattered herself that few small houses in London would be more perfectly appointed.

But this evening Wilmot's interest was not to be aroused by the house, or by the prospects of which a week ago it might have served as a reminder. A prolonged silence followed Mr. Maitland's remark, and then Norgate, still leaning back in his chair, removed the cigar from his lips and looked straight into Mr. Maitland's eyes.

"Has anything been said about postponing the wedding?" he asked.

"Good Lord, no!" was the answer. "I haven't heard a word."

"It could scarcely take place while — while Evangeline remains in her present condition!"

With a peculiar expression Mr. Maitland stared

for some moments at the tip of his cigar; his hand trembled slightly, and perhaps it may have been the fall of some ash on to the silk collar of his dinner-jacket that provoked an unusual oath.

"Well," he said, "that isn't my affair. You and Evangeline must talk things over and come to a decision between you. Only," Mr. Maitland added, with an eagerness which he strove to hide, "there's the one fact which I should like you to grasp."

"What is that?"

"The merely temporary nature of the ailment," was the answer.

"But are you quite certain it is only temporary?" demanded Wilmot.

"I can do no more than repeat Dr. Weston's assurance," said Mr. Maitland a little frigidly.

"He may have been afraid to let Evangeline hear the worst at once!"

Mr. Maitland's lips grew thinner during the short silence which followed.

"If," he exclaimed presently, "it would afford you the slightest gratification to see Weston for yourself, I have not the least objection in the world."

"Oh well, naturally it would be more satisfactory to hear his opinion at first hand," answered

Wilmot ; and at once changing his seat, Mr. Maitland drew near to the table and took a pen. When Norgate left the house ten minutes later, he carried a letter in which Dr. Weston was requested to speak with perfect freedom on the subject of Evangeline's infirmity. Wilmot posted the letter on his melancholy walk back to his rooms in Mount Street, where he threw himself into a chair and sat up far into the small hours, bewailing his unfortunate fate.

Having gone to Portman Square in the highest spirits, expecting, in spite of Evangeline's warning letter, to see her looking almost if not quite as beautiful and enticing as he had left her on his departure for Devonshire a few day previously, he had been confronted by the most absurdly grotesque face he had ever beheld or imagined. Surely, he told himself, it was devilish hard lines for a man ! It was one of those misfortunes which seem to be due to the sheer contrariousness of fate. He had done nothing to deserve it, and he could not at the moment see what he was to do to avert the consequences. Instead of attracting him, as Evangeline had done ever since their first meeting, the sight of her filled him with repugnance, and it required a powerful effort of the imagination to convince himself that she was indeed the same woman.

Unable to sleep so early or so late as usual, Wilmot rose betimes the next morning, tubbed, lingered disconsolately over his breakfast, and presently set forth before ten o'clock to walk to Dr. Weston's house in Brook Street. As he made his way along the familiar streets, Wilmot could not succeed in putting aside the terrible fear that Evangeline might be doomed for ever to wear the mask which at present disfigured her, and no hypochondriac ever entered the consulting-room with less comfortable sensations.

But Dr. Weston, who to judge by appearances might have been a prosperous farmer, and who had known Evangeline ever since she could walk, relieved Wilmot by an evident disposition to treat the case lightly.

Miss Maitland was suffering, he explained, from a local paralysis of the *portio dura* nerve from cold; probably in consequence of the sudden exposure of her warm face to a draught. The ailment was quite distinct from any disease of the brain, and it might conceivably disappear before the date of the wedding.

"On the other hand," Dr. Weston continued, tapping his table with a stethoscope, "I have known such cases last for several months—for eight or nine months. In the present unfortunate instance we can only hope for the best."

"But," urged Wilmot, leaning eagerly forward in his chair, "can you say it is probable she will be perfectly well in a fortnight?"

"My dear sir, you are asking me more than any merely human being can answer," said the doctor, with a smile. "As I tell you, I have known cases linger on for several months, and on the contrary I have seen patients recover in a few days. We must try to hope for the best."

"You have never," Wilmot persisted, "known a case where the patient has—has failed ultimately to recover?" and he fixed a pair of anxious eyes on Dr. Weston's face.

"Well, well," exclaimed the doctor, with a deprecatory wave of the hands, and Wilmot suddenly started to his feet in dismay.

"I understood from Mr. Maitland——"

"Quite so, quite so," Dr. Weston interrupted. "I have every hope that a very few weeks, or a few months at the outside, will see Miss Maitland perfectly well again. Certainly nothing is to be gained by leading her to take a despondent view."

"Still," muttered Wilmot, "you cannot assure me positively that she will ever get well?"

"My dear sir, I make no pretence to omniscience," was the answer. "I am hoping for a

perfect recovery, and at all events I really must beg you will not suggest to Miss Maitland that her disfigurement is likely to be permanent. After all, there is absolutely no reason to fear anything of the kind."

CHAPTER III

DAYS OF PROBATION

SOMETIMES on awakening in the morning, Evangeline would lie for a few moments trying her hardest to believe that her disfigurement was nothing worse than a peculiarly nightmareish kind of dream; but as soon as she became sufficiently wide-awake to grasp the painful reality of things, she would spring out of bed and hasten to her looking-glass in the hope of seeing that her re-transformation had begun.

She had never succeeded in regarding the infliction entirely without superstition. Having gone to bed on Sunday night apparently in the most perfect health, and certainly never more contented with her appearance, she had awakened on Monday morning still blissfully unconscious of any change in her face until she saw the startled expression in her maid's eyes when she entered the room with hot water and chocolate.

And when Evangeline, a little impatiently, demanded an explanation of Biggs's peculiar

demeanour, and presently sat up in bed, looking at her reflection (though scarcely at the moment able to believe it could be hers) in a hand-glass, it seemed that some spell had been cast upon her during the night, some penalty for her sins—whatever these might be.

Dr. Weston, it was true, took a sufficiently rational view of the case; he assured her that he had seen dozens in the routine of his practice of a similar kind; and of course, when Evangeline began to reason about it, she perceived that her infirmity had come about in the ordinary course of nature. Nevertheless there lingered a kind of sub-conscious feeling that the effect was out of all proportion to the cause, a feeling which, perhaps, she scarcely tried to check.

On this Friday morning, following Wilmot's return to London, Evangeline's looking-glass painfully convinced her that no improvement of any degree had taken place while she slumbered. She had, after two or three wakeful hours, fallen asleep with a prayer on her lips that she might be in a position to show Wilmot her usual face when he came to the house on the morrow, but another day had begun, and obviously her ordeal was by no means ended yet.

She ordered breakfast to be brought to her bedroom, and, the meal ended, Evangeline went

downstairs at about ten o'clock, where she found Mr. Maitland reading the newspaper as he finished his coffee. Glancing up eagerly on her entrance, he kissed her affectionately as she came to his side; then, rising, lighted a pipe and stood with his back to the fireplace, while he told Evangeline of his suggestion that Wilmot should consult Dr. Weston concerning her condition.

"I thought it would be the best way to satisfy him," Mr. Maitland continued. "Nothing I could say seemed to prevent Norgate from taking the most melancholy view of your case. He was apparently unable to conceive the possibility of your complete recovery."

"Sometimes," she answered with a sigh, "I find it difficult myself."

"But, my dear child, didn't Weston assure you it could only be a question of weeks? There is no doubt whatever about it."

"Oh dear!" cried Evangeline, "how devoutly I wish it might only come to pass before the twenty-fifth!"

Walking to one of the windows, Mr. Maitland stood gazing out at the garden of the Square.

"By the bye," he suggested in his most casual tone, "it doesn't appear to have occurred to you that it might be desirable to postpone the wedding."

"I can't say I haven't thought about it," Evangeline answered, "only I know that Wilmot would not for a moment hear of such a thing."

"Of course," said her father reflectively, "one can't deny that it would be the deuce of a nuisance now the invitations have been sent out and the presents sent in, and all the rest of it."

"I named August in the first place," Evangeline explained, "but Wilmot wouldn't give way. He pleaded so hard for this month——"

"Yes, yes, but never mind Norgate; try to forget the fellow for a moment. I should like to know your own wishes."

"If I didn't take Wilmot into account," cried Evangeline, "it would be rather like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark, don't you think?"

She smiled as she spoke, with the most disastrous effect upon her appearance, but still Evangeline found it difficult to take too melancholy a view of the state of affairs on such a glorious summer morning; she felt disposed to make all manner of excuses for Wilmot, assuring herself again and again that he would not fail to rise to the occasion when he came to the house, as she anticipated, later during the day.

"We won't compare it to a tragedy anyhow," said Mr. Maitland. "But come, you haven't told

me what is your own personal feeling about postponing the wedding."

"You may imagine that—that naturally I don't very much care to be seen while I am in this condition," was the answer.

"Then I am to understand that, granting Norgate has no objection, you are not likely to raise one?"

Evangeline's abnormal condition made her unusually, almost morbidly sensitive, and as Mr. Maitland showed a tendency to harp on one string she could not help wondering whether the tune had been suggested by Wilmot.

"Did he—did he mention the question of a postponement after he bade me good-bye last night?" she demanded, confronting her father impulsively.

"He certainly seemed to think it might be a little desirable to wait until you were quite well again," Mr. Maitland admitted.

Evangeline drew in her breath, and for a few moments stood with her hands tightly clasped before her, without uttering a word.

"Then—then Wilmot actually—actually wishes to put off the wedding. He told you that?" she murmured.

"Only for a time, only for a time, you must understand, Evangeline."

"Oh, I quite understand," she answered. "He simply prefers not to marry me while I look so hideous!"

"Well, well," said Mr. Maitland soothingly, "the best thing you can do, as I told Norgate, is to discuss it together. But take my advice and try to make allowances for the fellow."

"Allowances!"

"Of course, you know, it could not fail to be rather a shock."

He had not, for his own part, felt very much inclined to make many "allowances" for Wilmot the previous evening, but Mr. Maitland found it difficult to look at Evangeline's changed face this morning without experiencing some faint degree of reluctant sympathy with her lover. Moreover, as he reminded himself last night, Mr. Maitland had every reason to believe that her lasting happiness was dependent upon Wilmot; and, in the assured conviction that Evangeline would soon be herself once more, her father deprecated any impulsive severance of the tie which held her and Norgate together.

But her pride rose in arms at the bare suggestion that Wilmot could tolerate a day's unavoidable delay—he who had been so humble in his entreaty for expedition. As she stood confronting her father, calmly smoking his after-breakfast pipe,

she began to tell herself that Wilmot loved her (if it ought to be named love!) only for her beauty, and that this being marred, his enthusiasm had cooled at a time when sympathy ought surely to have intensified his regard. She felt something like a lessening of her own self-respect, inasmuch as she had made only that kind of appeal and possessed no intrinsic power to hold him.

A few minutes later she left Mr. Maitland and returned to her own room with the most melancholy feelings, but, as the slow hours passed and the dreary morning wore away, her natural cheerfulness of disposition led her gradually to take a brighter view. Biggs came to the room carrying a basket of exquisite roses, and the sight of these wrought a welcome revolution in Evangeline's mind. Taking Wilmot's card from the top of the cool, fragrant basket, she stood staring at it for a few seconds, perplexing herself to discover fresh excuses for him, and in order to accomplish her purpose the more effectually she went once more to the glass to inspect her face.

Evangeline stood there some time, and presently turned away with a growing sense that perhaps after all she had done him less than justice. She succeeded in persuading herself that the suggested postponement must be nothing less than an act of pure self-abnegation on his part; whereas none

but Evangeline could form the remotest notion of what the proposal must have cost him ! The truth was, she told herself, that perceiving how distasteful she would find any public ceremony he had hinted at delay merely to spare her a painful experience.

Separating the roses, white and yellow and red, she placed them about the room, more contented now than she had felt since Monday morning ; and when she heard of his arrival at about four o'clock, she left her chamber and ran downstairs almost gleefully, entering the drawing-room with her hands outstretched, forgetting at the moment the figure she presented—the more ludicrous because of her gladsome welcome. Advancing slowly to meet her, Wilnot took her hands and stooped to kiss her forehead as he had done yesterday.

“Thank you so much for those lovely roses !” cried Evangeline, striving against a renewal of her former disappointment.

“Are you better ?” he asked, in a curiously formal tone, and quite unnecessarily, because of the evidence of his eyes. Evangeline shrugged her shoulders as if it scarcely mattered.

“I feel perfectly well,” she answered. “Perfectly ! I have never felt better.” Then Evangeline paused for an instant. “My father,” she continued in a low voice, “told me you were going to see Dr. Weston.”

"Oh—er—yes," said Wilmot, with very obvious embarrassment.

"Well?" she demanded eagerly.

"He seems to have every—every hope that you will soon be all right again."

"But," exclaimed Evangeline hastily, "isn't he absolutely certain?"

Although Wilmot had not come to Portman Square this afternoon with the intention to give her a more despondent opinion of the future, he was too completely obsessed by the idea of the immensity of his own misfortune to be capable of bestowing much consideration upon hers.

"Oh well, I suppose he feels almost certain," he answered a little awkwardly.

"He—he told me there was no shadow of doubt," murmured Evangeline.

"We will do our best to imagine there is none," said Wilmot. "Anyhow Weston assured me again and again that he hopes you will soon be quite yourself."

"And therefore worthy of my lord's approval!" she cried with a laugh, but seeing him wince as he turned away, Evangeline grew grave again. A few minutes later she drew close to his side, with her fingers on the lapel of his frock-coat. "Wilmot," she said, in a little above a whisper, "do you

remember our talk a day or two before you went to see your people?"

"What was it about?"

"I remarked on the truism that beauty invariably withers and decays."

"Still, a good many flowers blossom again later on," he suggested.

"Ah yes," she returned, "but you must tend them carefully during the interval or they die."

She felt conscious of an unprecedented longing for sympathy, a longing to be consoled with, petted as if she were a child. Hitherto, in the ordinary course of things, she had been perhaps a little disdainful and independent, but to-day she could almost bring herself to supplicate.

"I told you then," she cried, "that I should like to be loved for my real self."

"For what else?" he asked, as he had asked on that other occasion.

Stepping away from Wilmot, Evangeline sat down, and for the next few seconds neither spoke. Then, with perceptible nervousness, she leaned forward in her chair.

"I will say it," she cried, "although I had determined to be sufficiently discreet to keep my own counsel. But yesterday evening when you came here, you—you seemed to shrink from me!"

"No—no," muttered Wilmot.

"But yes—yes," Evangeline insisted. "You shrank from me! And, when I saw you, I thought if we were married and I grew plain you would never cease to regret that I was your wife."

"Don't you think," he urged, "that you are tormenting yourself with morbid imaginings?"

Evangeline shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course," she continued, "I know very well I look grotesque. I might be wearing a comic mask, but still I am exactly the same as I used to be; I have the same thoughts, the same feelings."

"And," he forced himself to say, although with little warmth, "in a few weeks, we hope, you will again have the same face."

As she raised her eyes, rather abruptly, Wilnot observed a peculiarity about one of them, the paralysis having extended to the right eyelid, which she was entirely unable to blink.

"Suppose it should never become the same again," she suggested. "Because you have just been telling me that Dr. Weston admits the possibility."

Until this afternoon she had been assured that her ultimate recovery was certain, and even now she could scarcely grasp the significance of Wilnot's only half-intended admission. For his own part, he durst not contemplate the perpetuity of her disfigurement in connection with the course

which might appear to be incumbent on him as a man of honour. Although he answered, as he perceived he was expected to answer, there was no heart in his words.

"It would make no difference," he said, while Evangeline gazed steadily into his face. "Nothing in the world can prevent our marriage—in the long run."

"Ah, Wilmot, but you don't understand," she answered quietly. "You seem to judge things a little superficially. I am trying to look deeper. Because I should rather like to know where I stand. Suppose—suppose that I were your wife and—and like this!"

"For God's sake, don't let us harrow our feelings by supposing anything of the kind!"

"Yet you have told me it is by no means quite impossible," she persisted.

"Anyhow, the fact would remain; you would be my wife," he cried brusquely.

"And," said Evangeline, by no means unimpressed by his manner, "you would regard it as your extreme misfortune."

Wilmot came to her side, standing a little behind her chair, with one hand resting on its back—

"After all, you know," he answered, forcing a laugh, "you can scarcely expect me to have

the wretched taste not to prefer your earlier style."

"Yet does—does my face matter so much; does it really matter?"

"Are you trying to persuade me that it is of no consequence to you?" he demanded.

"It has always seemed of far too great consequence," she retorted. "That is precisely what I am being compelled to feel. If you take away such beauty as you used to insist that I possessed, what is there left? And yet," she exclaimed a moment later, "how absurdly inconsistent I am! because I am wishing you cared for just that residuum. But it's no use. You don't care, Wilmot! You don't care for it or value it in the least."

"I know that things couldn't have happened more cussedly," he answered; and Evangeline fancied that he showed her somewhat less courtesy than usual.

"You spoke to my father about postponing the wedding," she remarked, after a short silence.

"Only until you were well again."

"I have told you that I am perfectly well."

"I think you understand what I mean," he returned with an approach to irritability.

"I should very much like to understand," Evangeline insisted. "Was the delay suggested for my sake or for your own?"

"Suppose we agree to put it down to a sense of the general fitness of things."

Evangeline passed a hand rather wearily over her forehead. Everything seemed strangely, painfully changed, when she remembered his demeanour at their last interview before he left London. To-day his voice expressed nothing resembling enthusiasm, and he could speak of their wedding as coolly as if he were discussing the purchase of a table or a suite of chairs for the house in South Audley Street.

"The fact is," said Evangeline, "you feel that it would be too painful to attempt to go through with it as I am!"

"Would it not be?" he asked.

"Yet you seemed so eager," she answered, in a tone which suggested that she was making an effort to seize his point of view, "that I would not think of the unpleasantness to myself in my wish to gratify you."

"It may be only—only for a few weeks," he urged in a half-hearted tone.

"Ah, but you used to declare that you even begrudged the hours!"

"Heaven knows it was true!" said Wilmot, turning towards the window.

"Well," cried Evangeline, "we must try to hope I may be worthy of you soon."

"For pity's sake don't be sarcastic," he answered, facing her again.

"Then will you tell me how long the wedding is to be delayed?" she demanded. "Or perhaps the better plan will be to leave it an open question. Is that what you prefer? You can let me know when you consider I am fit——"

"Evangeline——"

"When you consider I am fit to be your wife," she continued remorselessly.

Although she certainly seemed to be putting him in the wrong, Wilmot assured himself that he was to be pitied rather than blamed. Nobody could suggest that he had done anything to deserve this immense misfortune which had come upon him! He began to walk restlessly about the room, and to do him justice he was going through a severe struggle. Presently he came to a standstill in front of her chair.

"If—if you really feel," he said, "that you can bring yourself to go through with it as we had arranged on the twenty-fifth——"

"Oh, but isn't that rather paltry of you?" she interrupted contemptuously.

"Paltry!"

"Whatever we do, let us be sincere with each other," she continued. "At all events, you have determined that the wedding shall be put off.

The postponement will give me a busy day or two ; there will be a good many letters to write, and so forth. I wish," said Evangeline, as she rose from her chair, "you would tell father what you have decided, I think you will find him in the smoking-room."

CHAPTER IV

KILLING TIME

ALTHOUGH Wilmot Norgate entertained the greatest regard for Mr. Maitland, he would have preferred to leave the house in Portman Square without seeing him this afternoon. There are certain ordeals which no man would willingly undergo. While trusting one might rise to the occasion, it were better that the occasion should not arise. Wilmot could not remain blind to the disagreeable fact that circumstances had placed him in a false position, and it appeared obvious that Mr. Maitland could scarcely fail to see him in a disadvantageous light.

He liked to think favourably of himself whilst other men thought favourably of him, but in the present unfortunate emergency Mr. Maitland would have been more or less than human if he were free from bias. However, in the face of Evangeline's suggestion that he should inform her father of the decision which had recently been arrived at, Wilmot did not see his way to avoid the interview, and on

reaching the hall he tapped at the smoking-room door.

Bidden to enter, Wilmot explained, not without considerable embarrassment, that it had been deemed mutually desirable to postpone the wedding, and he perceived that the announcement was not taken in very good part.

"What," asked Mr. Maitland, after one or two remarks, which Wilmot fancied were intended to be sarcastic, "do you propose to do concerning the house in South Audley Street?"

"It is just possible I may go in myself to keep the place warm," said Wilmot; "it will only be until Evangeline is able to join me there. I need not tell you," he added, with a great deal of intensity, "how ardently I am longing to see the day."

Wilmot Norgate certainly spoke nothing but the truth. Nothing could have been more ardent than his desire to see Evangeline herself once more! When his thoughts dwelt upon her as she had been the day he bade her good-bye, exactly a week ago, the image took entire possession of him. Nevertheless, he had felt conscious of repugnance when he looked into her face this afternoon, and he told himself that he would sooner throw himself into the Thames than make her his wife in her present condition.

With some difficulty Mr. Maitland curbed his temper, and allowed Wilmot to leave the house without hearing what was thought of him, but the alteration of the plans made Mr. Maitland a little irritable, for he feared that the postponement might reflect disadvantageously on his daughter.

A few minutes after Wilmot's departure Evangeline came slowly downstairs, and entered the smoking-room just as if nothing unusual had occurred, with a remark that she had heard him leave the house.

"Well," said Mr. Maitland, as she closed the door, "upon my word this is a nice kettle of fish!"

"Still, it may be for the best," answered Evangeline, with a sigh.

"Of course, if Norgate has converted you to his own opinion——"

"You—you can't imagine that I really object to a few weeks more freedom?" she cried.

"After all," said her father, "I suppose it's only natural a man should wish his bride to look her best," and he scrutinised Evangeline's face in a little perplexity, until suddenly her manner changed.

"I don't think," she faltered, "that it would have mattered to me how Wilmot looked! If anything

of the kind had happened to him, I—I can't imagine I should have asked him to wait."

Mr. Maitland laughed rather grimly—

"You might even have persuaded yourself that you liked the fellow better!" he suggested.

"It's not very easy to believe he likes me better," exclaimed Evangeline.

"My dear girl," said her father, "you must understand that I am nothing if not a partisan. I plump for you! When Norgate first hinted at delay, the natural man in me suggested showing him the door and telling him to go to the devil. But, for all that, you must try not to be entirely unreasonable. You must admit that this—this kind of thing can scarcely gratify him."

"Yet you have just been suggesting that if only the case were reversed, I might even like Wilmot better!"

"Ah yes, but you're a woman, and there's the eternal difference. Norgate isn't a romantic boy. He's a man who has knocked about a bit. I shouldn't have felt very much surprised if you had told me the whole thing was at an end, but as it isn't, you must wait patiently until your face is all right again, and then—well, I don't suppose you will have anything more to complain of than you had a week or so ago."

"But," said Evangeline, with an anxious expres-

sion, "Dr Weston seems to have told Wilmot I may never be quite the same as I used to be; that it was possible I might be like—like this always."

Mr. Maitland now ceased to discuss Wilmot Norgate's behaviour, and the inconvenience it promised to occasion, in his anxiety to ridicule the suggestion that her beauty might never be restored; but on the doctor's next visit, Evangeline in her father's presence began to cross-examine Weston in such a determined manner that he was at last compelled to admit the bare possibility of her permanent disfigurement.

"Still, I don't look forward to anything of the sort for the moment," said Dr. Weston. "As I told you, in the first place, I fully expect to see you perfectly well in a few months at the outside."

Evangeline could only try to hope that this might prove to be the case, but the next few days passed without the slightest sign of improvement. Finding the time hang heavily on hand, she often wished for a little more of Wilmot's society, although there remained a strong undercurrent of feeling that it would be useless to talk to him about what was the most in her mind. It was true that he continued to come to the house every afternoon, but he took care never to stay very long;

his ardour never brought blushes to Evangeline's cheeks in these dismal days, and she perceived that his visits were entirely perfunctory.

Her whole life seemed to be thrown out of gear, so that she could examine at her leisure the parts of which it had been made up. For some time past Evangeline had been accustomed, during the season, to spend almost every evening away from home, and many afternoons; she had risen late in the morning, and usually put in an appearance in the Row, always with a posse of men in her train. But in these latter days she shrank from showing her face even to the servants of the house; she seldom went out during the daytime, while she had been persistently "not at home" to any of her friends who came to Portman Square.

Thrown for amusement entirely on her own resources, Evangeline soon became convinced of their scantiness, especially as Dr. Weston had advised her to use her eyes as little as possible, and she was consequently cut off from books. She would sit at her bedroom window for hour after hour, hidden by the curtains, and watching the cabs, carriages, and omnibuses pass along Orchard Street, with constant glances at her watch.

"Father," she said, coming to his side one day,

"can't you tell me how to make the time fly just a little more quickly?"

Mr. Maitland closed his book, laid down his pipe, and passed a hand caressingly over Evangeline's head.

"Isn't there anything you would like to do?" he asked.

"I should love to go to sleep until I get well again," she answered.

"Should you care to turn your back on London—to get away into the country?" said Mr. Maitland. "We might be able to find a snug little box somewhere out of the world and shut ourselves up for a bit."

"No," she cried, after a few moments' reflection, "I don't think I should care to go away just yet—by and by, perhaps."

But Evangeline soon began to realise the absolute necessity of doing something which would at least relieve the present tedium, and she felt almost astonished at her own preference for something useful in a world which hitherto had been regarded as a pleasant kind of playground. Evangeline had a friend, a former school-fellow, some years older than herself—a remarkably plain woman, whose life seemed to be devoted to good works.

Latterly their ways had lain far apart, and

they had met infrequently; but now Evangeline wrote to Sibella Gordon, begging her to come to Portman Square, where she arrived in the garb of an Anglican sisterhood, and (so closely did Evangeline at present notice such trifles) she was the first person who had ventured to kiss her lips since the transformation. Without much circumlocution, Evangeline told Sibella of her urgent necessity.

"The emptiness of the days is terrible," she said, "and nobody seems in the least able to tell me how to fill them."

Sibella also found it somewhat difficult, for on inquiry it appeared that Evangeline was not very expert at anything in particular. Although she could sing a little, play a little, draw and paint a little, although she understood the more popular art of Bridge, yet there seemed to be no gap which she could fill; nothing she could do which any other human being required. In the end, however, as a kind of forlorn hope, Sibella inquired whether Evangeline could sew.

"Not very skilfully, I am afraid," she answered, with a sigh. "You see my maid has done almost everything for me since I was a small child. Now you begin to understand what a perfectly useless creature I really am."

"Well," said Sibella cheerfully, "we must all

crawl before we can walk. You may as well make a beginning. If you give me the money I will go at once to buy some calico. I can come back for half an hour to cut it out, and put you in the right way."

Evangeline set about her elementary labours with the zest of a child with a new toy, and it is true that a child might have done the work better. With the detestable bandage over her right eye, she sat at her upper window hour after hour, day after day, stitching and pricking her fingers, unpicking and sewing again.

Often she dropped the calico on to her knees and gazed straight before her wondering whether this could actually be herself, for she seemed gradually to have become conscious that her face was by no means the only part of her that had changed. And sometimes Evangeline began to doubt whether she was destined to marry Wilmot Norgate after all, although up to the present there could be no question that her greatest happiness lay in his direction.

At the first her chief concern had been with his feelings about her transformation, and she had perplexed herself and made her head ache by persistent efforts to reconcile his present demeanour with his former protestations of undying love. Now, however, she was beginning

to analyse her own emotions, with the consequence that it became far more difficult to make excuses for Wilmot, whom she was able to judge with a new and significant impartiality as the twenty-fifth of June drew very near.

CHAPTER V

MRS. OPPENSHAW

EVEN in his youth Wilmot had regarded Mrs. Oppenshaw as quite an old woman, although nobody seemed to know her precise age. She was short and slim, with a small wrinkled face and remarkably bright eyes. Mrs. Oppenshaw invariably carried what at a casual glance appeared to be a fan; it contained, however, two pairs of spectacles—one for shorter, one for longer distances, and without this she could distinguish nothing.

She was still in robust health, and showed a disposition to scoff at the luxury of a degenerate age. She breakfasted considerably earlier than Wilmot Norgate, for instance; and in London, at least, took a great deal more exercise—insisting on walking a certain distance every day in fair weather or foul. She dispensed with the services of a maid, preferring, as she said, to do everything for herself; and if she also did not a little to promote the welfare of other

persons, Mrs. Oppenshaw was apt to prove somewhat plain-spoken in return.

Partly from long habit, partly perhaps from a sense of favours to come, Wilmot had never failed to devote a certain proportion of his time to her, until he became affianced to Evangeline Maitland; but from that day Mrs. Oppenshaw had very seldom seen him, and since his return from Devonshire he had not taken the trouble to go to her house.

Having received a formal notice of the postponement of the wedding on account of the indisposition of the bride, and having subsequently made more than one unsatisfactory inquiry at Portman Square, Mrs. Oppenshaw—tantalised by curiosity—sent Wilmot Norgate a peremptory summons.

When he came to her house in Green Street, on the evening of June the twenty-second, she began with a reproach on the score of his recent neglect, and then, going straight to the point, put a few leading questions which soon elicited all the facts of the case.

"I confess I am disappointed!" Mrs. Oppenshaw exclaimed, surveying Wilmot through her long-handled eye-glasses, as he finished his explanation.

"Disappointed that the wedding should be

put off until Evangeline is well again!" returned Wilmot, with a smile. "Upon my word there doesn't seem to be anything very extraordinary about that."

"Well again!" cried Mrs. Oppenshaw. "You have just been leading me to understand that she is perfectly well at the present moment."

"In a sense—yes, no doubt. But I assure you that her face has undergone the most diabolical transformation you can possibly conceive."

"Who first suggested the postponement?" asked Mrs. Oppenshaw.

"Oh well," said Wilmot a little hesitantly, "we naturally talked the matter over, and the amendment was carried by common consent."

"Still, I suppose you didn't both speak at once," she snapped out. "What I am trying to discover is who spoke first."

"I believe it was I——"

"What a disillusioning!" Mrs. Oppenshaw interrupted, and she drew a deep sigh.

"It was indeed," answered Wilmot promptly. "Upon my soul I never experienced such a shock in my life as that evening I got back from Devonshire."

"I wasn't thinking of you," she retorted. "But what a disillusioning for Evangeline."

"Heaven knows I have suffered enough," he

exclaimed, throwing aside some of his customary reserve. "When I said good-bye to Evangeline, there wasn't a more beautiful girl in the world. Her face hadn't a flaw! But when I saw her on my return——"

"Well?" urged Mrs. Oppenshaw rather impatiently as Wilmot paused.

"I can't bring myself to talk about it—even to you," he muttered.

Mrs. Oppenshaw, however, had more to say.

"I should like to understand how you intend to act," she asked. "Do you still mean to marry Evangeline?"

"The moment she recovers."

"But you hint at something more than a possibility that she may never be what she was before!"

"That," answered Wilmot, with considerable feeling, "is a contingency which I am simply unable to face. It is of no use—I am bound to shirk it. I try to make myself think she will soon be all right again—though it's hard enough when I look at her. I can scarcely even now believe in her identity. The woman I wanted for my wife—Heaven knows I want her still as much as ever!—seems to have vanished, and in her place— But," he broke off abruptly, "I can't talk about it."

"Yet, she hasn't vanished," said Mrs. Oppenshaw quietly. "Evangeline is still there, only the truth

is that you haven't sufficient penetration to recognise her."

"Upon my word," he cried, "I hate to seem to dwell on—on her infirmity, but if you could only see her, I think you would be able to understand."

"I should exceedingly like to see her," was the answer, for Mrs. Oppenshaw found it difficult, almost impossible indeed, to realise the transformation at which Wilmot hinted. "Perhaps," she suggested, "you may succeed in persuading Evangeline to admit me."

Eager to justify his conduct in Mrs. Oppenshaw's eyes, and confident that it was only necessary for any impartial judge to see Evangeline, he promised to do his utmost to bring about a meeting, and on his next visit to Portman Square, Wilmot sought an early opportunity to introduce the subject.

"Father is talking of taking me away," said Evangeline, when Norgate had been a few minutes in the drawing-room. "Of course I have the usual number of country-house invitations, but I pine for some secluded place where I can live all day out of doors without being stared at as if I were some kind of show. I have been wondering," she added, "about your own plans."

"I haven't made any," he returned. "At present, I seem only to be waiting on fortune."

"Isn't that a little unprofitable?" said Evangeline. "But at all events you don't dream of waiting in London all the autumn?"

She seemed to be continually holding out a hand, as it were, to help him over the stile, and occasionally she blamed herself for too much humility. But she longed to hear him say: "Where thou goest, I will go," although the prospect of seclusion would a few weeks since have possessed no stronger enticement for Evangeline than for Wilmot. Admiration had been her daily food until circumstances enforced abstinence; but now all this was changed, and she began to long for fresh sea-breezes, for "the wind on the heath," for open air and solitude.

"When," he asked, "do you think of going?"

"Nothing has been definitely arranged," she answered. "I seem to be leading an unstable life just now and the days pass terribly slowly."

"By the bye," cried Wilmot, "I happened to see Mrs. Oppenshaw yesterday. Nobody could have been more anxious to hear all about you, and I promised to do my best to persuade you to see her."

Evangeline glanced at him almost suspiciously. She was quickly on the alert, and felt that she should very much like to know precisely what Wilmot had been saying about her. Mrs. Oppen-

shaw was his oldest friend, and but for her intervention Evangeline and Wilmot might probably never have met. Mrs. Oppenshaw (any woman indeed) could scarcely fail to perceive that he had regarded the matter from a selfish standpoint, whereas she was the kind of person to tell Wilmot exactly what she thought.

Evangeline looked into his face with a reckless smile.

"So after your description," she exclaimed, "Mrs. Oppenshaw wishes to judge for herself. Well, you may give her my love and tell her she shall have the opportunity to-morrow afternoon, if she likes."

"Then," cried Wilmot, rising abruptly to go away, "I suppose I shall not see you until the next day?"

She tormented herself by the reflection that he seemed relieved by the prospect of passing the day without his usual visit, and she could not help wishing that he had suggested coming during the morning, or at any unoccupied moment, as he had been accustomed to do before his departure for Devonshire. But pride prevented Evangeline from giving him the slightest hint of anything of the kind, and when Wilmot bade her good-bye she issued instructions that Mrs. Oppenshaw was to be admitted whenever she came to the house.

"Though," Evangeline told Mr. Maitland that night, "I hate to have to feel that I am being discussed and inspected in this way."

They were walking as she spoke across Hyde Park towards Knightsbridge, Evangeline hanging on her father's arm; her face being swathed in flannel, so that she wore a wide-brimmed hat and a jacket with a high collar to hide the bandages. It was a warm summer evening, with the moon almost at the full in a clear sky. Evangeline had come to look forward to these late rambles with Mr. Maitland, and during their wanderings about the streets she saw many phases of life which were entirely new to her experience. Her sympathies seemed to have broadened of late, and the money which her enforced seclusion had already enabled her to save had found its way along other channels. At the same time Evangeline grew conscious of a deepening sadness, as if, in spite of herself, she were becoming gradually but steadily impressed by some disagreeable truth.

"I understood," said Mr. Maitland, "that you had made up your mind to see nobody."

"Mrs. Oppenshaw is to be the only exception," was the answer. "Wilmot seemed rather to wish it—and you know I am becoming very humble-minded. I am often surprised at myself."

"Still, I am not at all certain the experience

won't do you good in the long run," said her father, as they drew near to the Marble Arch again.

"Sometimes I think I should prefer the ills I know," murmured Evangeline.

"Ah, but the fact remains that you are gaining a fresh point of view, and, if you only have time, you may even discover what a very small and unimportant corner of the world you mistook for the universe," said Mr. Maitland; and she admitted to herself, as she walked by his side through the quiet streets, that there might be something in his words.

The next day, somewhat to her own surprise, Evangeline found herself looking forward quite eagerly to the change which would be afforded by Mrs. Oppenshaw's visit, while her reluctance to be seen had almost unconsciously diminished during the last week.

Mrs. Oppenshaw, for her own part, approached the house in Portman Square with extreme curiosity, and a firm determination to do her utmost to allay the irritation which, she had no doubt whatever, Evangeline must be feeling. The moment Mrs. Oppenshaw entered the drawing-room, she was constrained to acquit Wilmot of the imagined exaggeration, and hastening towards her hostess, she took Evangeline's right hand sympathetically between both her own.

"Poor child! poor child!" she murmured, with

tears in her eyes ; and Evangeline found Mrs. Oppenshaw's manner not a little disconcerting. Trying to speak without emotion, she indicated a chair. "It was nice of you to see me," the visitor added, with her eyes still on Evangeline's face as she sat down.

"You are the only one I have admitted, except Wilmot, of course," said Evangeline.

"To-morrow," cried Mrs. Oppenshaw, unable yet to control her feelings, "to-morrow was to have been your wedding-day."

"And the weather seems so beautifully settled," was the answer.

Then in a hasty, excited manner Evangeline began to inquire after one or two common friends ; and although Mrs. Oppenshaw stayed half an hour, she could find no opportunity to speak a word in season, an inability the more annoying because she was every minute gaining a stronger conviction of its desirability. But Mrs. Oppenshaw had sufficient discernment to perceive that Evangeline was in a mood to resent anything of the nature of interference, and she did not feel capable of rushing in where an angel might well fear to tread. Finally she bade Evangeline good-bye, and left Portman Square with a grave expression on her wrinkled face. She walked the short distance to Green Street, and, as soon as she had taken off her bonnet,

sat down to write to Wilmot Norgate, who was commanded to attend upon her the same evening. Mrs. Oppenshaw despatched the letter to Mount Street by hand, and when in due course Wilmot arrived after dinner she received him with far greater tolerance than she had shown when last bidding him farewell.

"Unfortunately, you were quite correct in one thing," she cried, taking his proffered hand. "I couldn't have imagined such a terrible transformation."

"If you had met Evangeline in the street," he answered, rather eagerly, "you would not have recognised her."

"That is true enough," she admitted; "but still you have made a false move—it was a lamentable mistake to put off the wedding."

For a moment, Wilmot met Mrs. Oppenshaw's gaze steadily without speaking; then he lowered his eyes to the carpet.

"Even granting that this disfigurement is to be lasting," she continued, "you would still have no alternative. You can't be blind enough not to see that. No decent man could refuse to fulfil his engagement."

"Can you imagine a worse fate than to be compelled to keep it?" he demanded.

Leaning back in her chair, Mrs. Oppenshaw

regarded Wilmot through her eye-glasses for some time in silence. She was sincerely disappointed.

"I begin to suspect," she said deliberately, "that I have never really understood your true character all the years I have known you. Wilmot!" she exclaimed, "I think you are the most frankly selfish man I have ever had anything to do with; and that is what you would describe as a very large order indeed."

"Well, I don't know——"

"Have you never for a single moment felt that you could let it be your object in life to console the girl—to make some attempt to lessen her trouble? Because, whatever it may be to you, it must be a terrible grief to Evangeline."

Wilmot sat with his eyes on the carpet as if he were considering the question, but presently he looked up with a despondent shake of the head, and Mrs. Oppenshaw scarcely gave him time to answer.

"She would have done it for you!" she exclaimed. "She would have devoted her life to you!"

"It's no good," he said doggedly. "Of course, if it comes to that, it's devilish hard lines on Evangeline; but I can't imagine myself with—with a wife like that, and it's no use pretending I can. I hope to goodness there's no necessity."

"Still," urged Mrs. Oppenshaw, "don't you think you might dissemble a little while her infliction lasts? At least you must be capable of pretending you feel [a spark or two of sympathy for the woman you asked to marry you. For one thing, anybody can see she is bored to death; it would be easy enough to give her a little more of your company."

"There are some potions it is impossible to swallow without making a grimace," said Wilmot as he rose from his chair.

"In private!"

"I am aiming at privacy," he returned. "I dare say it sounds rather brutal, but I confess I go to Portman Square as seldom as possible. Every visit proves a fresh ordeal. I can't endure——"

"Yes, yes," cried Mrs. Oppenshaw, "I can quite understand a little—even a little repugnance. But if you found you couldn't overcome it, you might surely have disguised it more effectually. By and by," she added, "you will wake in the night and blush to look back on these days."

"The sooner the better!" said Wilmot eagerly. "My chief desire in life is to be in a position to look back on them."

"When you do," was the answer, "I am not at all certain that Evangeline will be your wife. She is beginning to review the situation——"

"Unfavourably for me, do you mean?" he demanded.

"Could it conceivably be otherwise?" cried Mrs. Oppenshaw. "Still, perhaps it isn't too late yet. Take my advice; try to practise a little deceit, even if it is for the first time in your life. I fancy the end will justify the means."

CHAPTER VI

A REACTION

WILMOT NORRIDGE, in his luxuriously furnished sitting-room on a first floor in Mount Street, was surrounded by photographs of Evangeline: they stood on the mantelshelf and on the table, they hung against the walls; photographs at full length, in her presentation dress, in her riding-habit, in her golfing suit; enlarged heads in platinotype and in carbon: whichever way he might turn he was confronted by her face as it used to look in the zenith of her loveliness only a few weeks ago.

On the night of his not very agreeable interview with Mrs. Oppenshaw, surrounded by these tantalising reminders of what Evangeline Maitland had been, Wilmot sat smoking cigarette after cigarette until the ash-tray was piled with ends, while he reflected on the hardness of his lot, the cruelty of fate, and the bitterness of his disappointment.

To-night should have been the eve of his

wedding; he had arranged to entertain a few congenial spirits at a bachelors' dinner, now postponed; and he longed for his bride (as here represented) more ardently than ever he had longed for her before. She seemed to be more real in the numerous photographs—most of which had been taken at his especial request—than when he had stood face to face with her yesterday in the drawing-room at Portman Square, and he felt that he would eagerly part with half of his possessions if only he could marry her to-morrow.

With Mrs. Oppenshaw's warning fresh in his mind he tried for once to adopt Evangeline's point of view, to examine the case as it must appear to her, and the result filled him with something like consternation. Wilmot was appalled at the suggestion that she might completely recover her beauty, and yet be lost to him. The circumstances being unfortunately what they were, the postponement of the wedding still appeared to be inevitable. Wilmot could not help shuddering at the notion of making Evangeline his wife in anything resembling her present condition; while, on the other hand, he could not tolerate the thought of losing her if, notwithstanding his apprehensions, this condition should prove to be only temporary.

It was late when he went upstairs to his bedroom that night, and before falling asleep he

arrived at the determination to change his tactics ; and at least to make a great effort to dissemble his repugnance, according to Mrs. Oppenshaw's advice. He made up his mind to go to Portman Square soon after breakfast the next morning — the morning to which he had long looked forward ; the morning that ought to have been his wedding-day — and to take Evangeline by surprise. Having the average man's confidence in jewels as peacemakers, Wilmot left Mount Street at about ten o'clock, entered the first hansom he saw, and directing the driver to New Bond Street, spent half an hour over the inspection of various trays of gems, finally deciding upon a half-hoop diamond ring for which he drew a cheque for a large amount. Thus efficiently armed, he walked to Mr. Maitland's house, where at the moment Evangeline was standing at her bedroom window, with her face enveloped in bandages, staring out at the garden of the Square.

She found it quite impossible to regard this as any common day. Before its close she had expected to leave her father's house as Wilmot's wife ; and downstairs in the drawing-room were scores of presents, which in the case of absolute necessity she would be unable to return to their donors without a pang.

When, to her astonishment, her maid entered the

bedroom with the announcement that Mr. Norgate was waiting to see her, Evangeline hastily removed the bandage from her face and turned to the looking-glass. In spite of all her doubts, her growing indignation, her wounded vanity, it was impossible not to experience a kind of gratification that he had made to-day an exception.

"Do you think there is any improvement?" she asked, facing her maid, after a prolonged inspection of herself, but Biggs reluctantly admitted there was none.

Evangeline turned again wistfully to the glass.

"None," she persisted; "don't you think there is any?"

"I'm very sorry, but I'm really afraid there isn't," was the answer.

With a sigh, Evangeline passed a comb through her hair, then left the room and walked slowly downstairs, striving, as she entered Wilmot's presence, after the sedate expression which seemed to make her disfigurement somewhat less obtrusive. As she advanced farther into the drawing-room, he came forward to meet her with greater cheerfulness than he had displayed since his return to London.

"You have not forgotten the day," he cried, almost tenderly.

"Forgotten!" she murmured, with quivering lips. "As if I could forget."

Fancying that she was on the point of breaking down, Wilmot compelled himself to take her in his arms, but as she reposed there, whether because she half-suspected Mrs. Oppenshaw's instigation, or because of a sensitiveness which made her morbidly quick to detect subtle nuances, Evangeline still seemed to miss something of his former enthusiasm. When a few moments later she attempted to release herself, Wilmot made no effort to restrain her, but, standing a few feet away, he took the ring from his waistcoat pocket, and held it out for her inspection.

"I think," cried Evangeline, "that I am being rather overwhelmed with presents just now!" But then, perceiving that her words might sound a little wanting in graciousness, she began to thank him for the diamonds with all the warmth she could muster.

Taking her hand, Wilmot put the ring on her finger, but, when she turned away and sat down, he selected a chair quite at the other side of the room. A chill seemed to come upon her; she began to warn herself that he was making an effort at amiability, with the result that Wilmot's part became not a little difficult to perform. He felt like an actor who is out of touch with his audience, and for once in his life he failed dismally even at small talk.

"Well," asked Wilmot, rising presently, "when shall I see you again?"

"Do — do you care to come to dinner this evening?" she suggested, unable to repulse him entirely.

"Afraid I can't very well manage that," was the answer. "I have an engagement with one or two men at the club. But I might get away directly after dinner and come round later, if you don't mind."

"Oh, well," said Evangeline, "we never go to bed very early, you know."

It was an emotional day for her after Wilmot had gone away, and she could not succeed in keeping her thoughts from the ceremony which ought to have distinguished it from every other. Evangeline had a solemn talk with her father during the afternoon, and as the slow, empty hours passed, she found herself looking forward expectantly to Wilmot's promised visit.

The days were at their longest, and Evangeline always loved the twilight. The butler did not come to draw down the drawing-room blinds until some time after she had seen Mr. Maitland light a cigar and had left the dinner-table, and even then she told the servant to switch on the electric light only of the crimson-shaded lamp which stood in a corner by one of the windows.

One of her eyes being a little weak at the time, Evangeline took a chair with its back to the lamp, so that the right (the most disfigured) side of her face remained completely in shadow, while the left caught very little light. There she sat, leaning back rather wearily, with "long, long thoughts," until the clock struck half-past nine, and soon afterwards, hearing a cab driven to the door, she assumed that Wilmot was arriving.

As he entered her presence, Evangeline held forth her right hand without rising, and he, able in the dim light to distinguish nothing which reminded him of her transformation, was struck by the charm of her pose, by the conspicuous whiteness of her shoulders, for by way of honouring the occasion she had dressed rather more elaborately than usual this evening.

"Afraid I'm a bit late," said Wilmot, standing in front of her chair.

"You are quite as early as I expected," answered Evangeline, and her voice seemed to intensify the impression that he must have been labouring under some hateful illusion during the past week or two.

"I—I have felt rather like a fish out of water the whole day," he exclaimed, and she could not repress a smile of satisfaction on detecting the tremor in his voice. As he drew still nearer, she shifted her position in order to keep him on her left.

"I hope you don't really mind this dim, religious light," she suggested.

"It perfectly suits my mood," he muttered, bending eagerly over her.

"What a glorious day it has been," she remarked ; and every word that was spoken this evening seemed to carry some allusion to the postponed event.

"Ah yes, the sun would have shone brightly upon my bride," said Wilmot, with considerable feeling.

"You surely don't mean to tell me you are superstitious enough to attach the slightest importance to that kind of thing," she answered.

"I should naturally prefer a cheerful beginning," he cried, and then, dropping on to one knee, Wilmot possessed himself of Evangeline's hands. She perceived that his voice had a different quality this evening, and it did not seem to matter what meaningless words he uttered, because of the love in his tone.

"Evangeline," he whispered.

"Well?" she said, glorying, in spite of all her recent doubts, in this return to brief authority.

"Evangeline——"

"Now, suppose you were to sit down properly," she cried with a laugh, and, as Wilmot rose obediently to take a chair, it happened that one of

his elbows struck the keyboard of the open pianoforte.

"Don't you ever play now?" he asked, abruptly facing her again.

"It is not very often that I am asked."

"Anyhow," he urged, leaning forward towards her, "it seems an age since I heard you."

"Should you like to hear me?" she inquired.

"Why, of course," said Wilmot; and, rising at once, she turned towards the music-stool, her face still remaning in the deep shadow.

"I am afraid you can scarcely see," he suggested, standing by her side.

"Oh, there is quite sufficient light," Evangeline hastily returned; and while Wilmot drew a chair within a few inches of the stool, she began to play low music, which, assisted doubtless by the day's peculiar emotions, seemed soon to throw a spell over them both.

Her left cheek was still turned towards Wilmot, and even this could be only indistinctly seen in the dim light. Every moment he seemed to sink more and more deeply under the pleasant illusion, until presently the whole of the past fortnight became blotted out; he had succeeded in finding "his own Evangeline," again the woman whom he longed to marry, and she felt his arm about her waist.

"Evangeline," he whispered, "by this time you ought to have been my wife."

"And why am I not?" she demanded, without turning her head.

"I wish to Heaven you were!" he cried, and at the same instant the music ceased.

Clasped passionately in his arms, Evangeline felt eager kisses on her lips. Assuring herself that, at least, Wilmot could not be dissembling to-night, she allowed her head to rest on his shoulder, looking up with a smile as he bent over her indistinguishable face, until suddenly they were interrupted by the opening of the door.

"All in the dark!" exclaimed Mr. Maitland, and at the same moment he touched the electric button, flooding the room with light.

When Evangeline raised her head at the unexpected illumination, her last state became worse than her first, as she perceived Wilmot's uncontrollable expression of disgust on distinguishing the face which a moment before he had been caressing.

Rising slowly from the music-stool, Evangeline walked back to her chair; and although Mr. Maitland felt inclined to regret his untimely arrival on the scene, he smiled with satisfaction, nor marvelled at Wilmot's obvious embarrassment. Mr. Maitland began to think that matters must be more hopeful

than he had imagined, and when Norgate went away a little later, Evangeline saw her father take a chair by her side, and lean back with a contented expression on his face.

"So the course of true love is beginning to run more smoothly again," he suggested. "After all, most sublunary troubles might be avoided by the exercise of a little common-sense."

"But my—my trouble could scarcely have been avoided," said Evangeline. "I daresay it is very foolish, but I don't believe I shall ever quite get rid of the notion——"

"That some wicked fairy bewitched you!" exclaimed Mr. Maitland.

"I am not at all certain the fairy was wicked, father!"

"Then you are actually revelling in your transformation," answered Mr. Maitland.

"You admitted that it had done me good," she insisted. "And—and surely it is desirable to be—to be wise in time."

"Well," he cried, as he rose from his chair, "your example doesn't seem to harmonise with your precept. When I entered the room just now, I couldn't help wondering why on earth the wedding had been postponed."

Evangeline did not answer, and when Mr. Maitland had gone downstairs again, her thoughts flew

erratically back to her schooldays, ten years ago, to a certain Christmas when a group of girls had acted a play before an audience of mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. Her own mother had been present.

Evangeline, aged twelve years, had been cast for the part of a princess who, owing to the machinations of a witch, was transformed into an ape. The prince, her lover, was played by Muriel Fairbank, now the wife of a distinguished soldier in India. In the great scene, Evangeline lay asleep on a gilded couch, covered from head to foot by a semi-transparent veil, when the prince stealing in, exposed her face, and started back in horror.

That was how Wilmot had looked to-night when Mr. Maitland switched on the electric light ! For a little while he had forgotten her disfigurement, but the moment he saw her again in the full light he had shrunk from her horror-stricken, like the prince in the extravaganza. This, it is true, had ended happily, but concerning the *denouement* of her own drama, Evangeline began to feel more doubtful than ever. Her recent experience seemed to be the last straw. She tried to make liberal allowances for Wilmot, admitting that her present appearance might excuse a little disappointment, although no conceivable change

in him could have affected her own regard for an instant. But her pride had been grievously hurt to-night, perhaps more grievously than before, and she began seriously to question whether the injury would not prove fatal to her prospect of becoming his wife.

CHAPTER VII

GOOD-BYE

WILMOT NORGATE'S reflections on his return to Mount Street that night were scarcely more favourable than Evangeline's. He had set forth to Portman Square with the determination to do his utmost to follow Mrs. Oppenshaw's advice, and to regulate his demeanour with the greatest discretion. At the outset his task had been made easy by circumstances, and something resembling his former passion for Evangeline had been re-awakened, until Mr. Maitland turned on the light.

Then, Wilmot feared, he had betrayed only too unmistakably the repugnance which it had been impossible to hide. Before he lay down that night Wilmot, reviewing the entire situation, arrived at the conclusion that the present ordeal was more than he could endure. His only safety seemed to lie in flight. He would act as he ought to have acted in the first place; he would go away from London, and absent himself until such time

as he heard of Evangeline's complete restoration to health ; for still in more hopeful moods Wilmot tried to convince himself that this blessed consummation might come to pass.

He rose the next morning with the firm intention to lose no time before announcing his departure, and on the way to Portman Square he happened to meet Dr. Weston.

"Miss Maitland doesn't seem to be getting any better just yet," remarked Wilmot, stopping in the middle of the pavement.

"Ah, but she will," was the cheery answer. "You needn't feel in the least uneasy. It's true the case is dragging on, but after all it hasn't lasted very long yet."

"Then, even now," said Wilmot, "you don't fear that it will be permanent?"

"Not for an instant," cried Dr. Weston. "Don't alarm yourself, and," he added, with a smile, "what is of far greater importance, don't alarm my patient."

Somewhat invigorated by the doctor's hopefulness, although it was no new thing, Wilmot continued his walk to Portman Square, without the slightest doubt that on the whole he had chosen the most judicious course.

"I had a letter from my people this morning," he remarked, with perfect truth, a few minutes after his arrival.

"Are they quite well?" asked Evangeline.

"They are never well," he answered, with a laugh. "They are annoyed if one even tells them they look well."

"At all events, I hope they are no worse than usual!" she said.

"The fact is," Wilmot explained, "I have an idea of running down to see them——"

"When?" asked Evangeline quickly.

"Perhaps the day after to-morrow. You can understand that I don't like to neglect my mother."

The conception of Wilmot Norgate as an affectionate and anxious son struck Evangeline as peculiarly ludicrous. It was not very easy to imagine that domesticity could ever be his strong point.

"Shall I see you again before you depart on your filial mission?" she asked.

"Surely you can't suppose I could leave London without coming to bid you good-bye!" he exclaimed. "I thought of turning up to-morrow afternoon."

"Yes, of course, we ought to say good-bye," said Evangeline; and after a shorter visit even than he had accustomed her to lately, Wilmot left the house, congratulating himself that he was not waylaid in the hall, as sometimes happened, by Mr. Maitland.

But Mr. Maitland had arranged to lunch at his club that day, and it was half-past four when he entered the drawing-room in quest of afternoon tea. Throwing himself into the most comfortable chair, he leaned back and crossed his legs with a sense of satisfaction, being prone to fall into unconventional attitudes. The tea equipage was brought in, and when Evangeline began to wait upon him, her unwonted taciturnity could not long remain unnoticed. Mr. Maitland liked to be talked to, and in the ordinary course of things his daughter was seldom backward in gratifying him.

"Anything the matter?" he asked presently.

"N—no," she answered.

"A little *distrain*?" he persisted.

"Only self-reproachful, father."

"What have you been doing?"

"Putting off until to-morrow what I ought to have done to-day," she answered.

"Have you had a visit from Norgate?" asked Mr. Maitland, drinking his tea.

"He came to tell me he is going to Devonshire the day after to-morrow," said Evangeline.

"You ought," cried Mr. Maitland, "to find a certain amount of gratification in the fact."

"Why?"

"A good son, they say, will make a good husband," he returned, with a smile.

Evangeline remained thoughtfully silent for several moments.

"Wilmot will never be my husband," she said quietly, and Mr. Maitland sat more upright in his chair.

"After what I saw when I entered this room last night I confess you astonish me."

"Ah yes, I was very, very foolish last night," she returned, with a blush. "But now I have quite made up my mind, and nothing is likely to alter it."

"Are you certain you won't feel sorry?" asked Mr. Maitland, with an anxious expression.

"Oh!" she murmured, "for that matter I think I shall always feel a kind of sorrow."

"Now, wouldn't it be judicious to leave things as they are until Norgate has done his duty by his old folks? Wait until his return——"

"I shall only wait till to-morrow," Evangeline insisted, and she was already looking forward with feverish impatience to Wilmot's next (and last) visit.

Yet there were moments during the evening when she experienced something approaching remorse; she could not help believing that Wilmot loved her—in his way; but it was not the way she desired, and with such love Evangeline could no longer be satisfied. Her transformation seemed at

least to have lifted her above certain conventionalities, to have made her less regardful of the outward show of things. She told herself that the last week or two had brought her closer to the essentials of life, that she had learnt to esteem forms as of minor importance. But to Wilmot they were everything; he had remained unchanged; and, her face being disfigured, there was nothing else which seemed to possess the slightest value for him.

She rose the following morning with a sense that to-day was destined to prove of even greater importance than yesterday; until luncheon the hours seemed to be never-ending; and by the time Wilmot entered her presence in the afternoon, Evangeline's feelings had become far too tense to permit of any beating about the bush. Interrupting his commonplace remarks, she looked straight into his face; there was little necessity to keep her own deliberately grave this afternoon.

"I wonder," she began quietly, "whether you can guess what I am going to say."

"Is it anything very tragic?" he asked, forcing a smile.

"Oh," cried Evangeline, "it is all far too mean for tragedy."

"Perhaps you prefer that I should not go away just now," he suggested, beginning to feel a little apprehensive.

"I don't in the least mind your going away," she said,—“but I must ask you never to come back to me.”

Rising excitedly from his chair, Wilmot stood staring blankly before him; but while freedom would have been welcome, if she were destined to look always as she looked to-day, he still longed with the greatest fervour to possess her as she used to be. A little way from her chair stood a photograph of Evangeline in her presentation dress, and she might have been a queen herself! There was the woman whom, of all the world, he desired; and, still hoping against hope for her resuscitation, the loss with which he was now threatened seemed irreparable. While, thanks to Mrs. Oppenshaw's warning, Wilmot could not fail to understand Evangeline's underlying motive, this appeared extremely difficult to modify.

“But what on earth has been happening since I was here yesterday?” he demanded.

“Nothing—except that I have gained more courage,” she retorted.

“Still,” he urged, with considerable eagerness, “you can scarcely have lost every particle of love for me in twenty-four hours!”

“Oh!” exclaimed Evangeline, throwing the whole of her pent-up indignation into the words, “you shrink from me as if I were a leper.”

"No—no," he muttered, not without a sense of something like shame.

"It is true that I am repulsive——"

"A few weeks," cried Wilmot, scarcely realising that he was tacitly admitting the impeachment, "and you will be the same as you were the day I first saw you."

"No," she answered, and Wilmot took a step towards her, "I shall never be the same again—never as long as I live."

"Has Dr. Weston——"

"Dr. Weston," Evangeline exclaimed contemptuously, "has nothing to do with it."

"Then you mean," he said, perceiving his false move, "you mean that you will never again be the same to me. Is that it, Evangeline?"

"I know it has been a cruel test," she returned. "I try to make every allowance; but no man could possibly have stood it worse."

Wilmot began to feel curiously at a loss; his only excuse being the extremity of her disfigurement, which obviously he durst not dwell upon to her face. To himself, save at rare moments, justification seemed perfectly easy; for surely no man on earth would choose to marry a woman who looked as Evangeline looked at this critical instant. And yet, when he remembered what she had been only a few weeks ago, what after all she might

conceivably become again a few weeks hence, he felt appalled at the idea of losing her.

"Evangeline," he said, "whatever I may have done, for Heaven's sake don't punish me in this way!"

For the moment she was touched by something in his attitude, and she reproached herself with cruelty, feeling convinced that she was hurting him.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "don't think I wish to punish you. It is far—very far from that!"

"You cannot," he insisted, seeing tears in her eyes, "without at the same time punishing yourself. Even if you think I am guilty," he continued, "don't pronounce sentence now. Let me come up for judgment later on. You can't forget the day before yesterday—the day you ought to have become my wife."

"No," she answered, with a shudder, "I shall never forget that day as long as I live."

"You loved me then——"

"I was weak for a little while," Evangeline admitted, "and you seemed to be something like yourself again. But, as soon as you could see my face, you showed your—your disgust; and—and," she added, holding back her head, "I will not submit to it."

Wilmot appeared perplexed to find an answer,

for all that she said was perfectly true ; he had betrayed the repugnance which he could not help feeling, and he sincerely wished that he had been able to dissemble with success. But still he told himself that never had a man been placed in a more difficult situation.

"You have me at a disadvantage," he said. "I—I confess that I scarcely know what to say—except what you must know without telling: that I have loved you since the first evening we met——"

"Does a man shrink from the woman he loves?" she demanded.

"Evangeline——"

"You arranged to leave London simply to avoid the necessity of seeing me day after day," she persisted.

"To avoid seeing the mask you are condemned to wear for a while," he answered, perceiving the futility of prevarication. "I am longing for the time when you will be able to take it off."

"Ah, but you can't understand that it is only a mask," she said. "And my face was all you could find to value in me. As to love—anything worthy of the name—you have not learnt what it is. I don't suppose you are capable of learning."

The accusation appeared manifestly ridiculous to a man of Wilmot Norgate's experiences, and perhaps a definition of their terms might have

shown that each meant a different thing by the same word: Evangeline's interpretation being the more comprehensive; Wilmot's the more simple and elemental.

At least he began to realise the uselessness of attempting to prolong the present interview, whilst yet refusing to regard it as absolutely their last. He persuaded himself that if Evangeline should happily be restored to health, she would resume her former habits, and in that case it would prove easy to find occasions to meet her. Then also, he had no doubt, she would put aside certain unpractical opinions which were probably due to her morbid condition and to her present secluded life.

The wound which it was inevitable (he told himself) that her pride had sustained at his hands, would naturally heal, and she was scarcely likely to remain very long unforgiving. For when Wilmot looked back only two days, when he remembered her willing surrender the evening before last, it was impossible to question that she loved him; whereas he could not believe that Evangeline was the kind of woman easily to change.

"Though you are sending me away now," he said, "I warn you I shall come again."

Evangeline shook her head—

"Your coming will not be of the slightest use," she murmured.

"Good-bye, Evangeline," he cried, with a smile which suggested that he was chiefly amused by her insistence, and after a momentary hesitation she held out her right hand. As Wilmot clasped it, he leaned forward and kissed her forehead, then without speaking again he walked to the door, opened it, and made his slow way downstairs.

While the interview had proved anything rather than an agreeable experience, Wilmot feared that he had yet to endure a worse quarter of an hour, for, in the circumstances, he realised that he could not leave the house without a few words with Mr. Maitland.

Finding the butler in the hall, Wilmot asked to be taken to the smoking-room, where he saw Mr. Maitland leaning back in one arm-chair with his feet on another; lying askew in order to get the light on his book. Recognising Wilmot Norgate, he dropped the volume casually on to the floor and rose slowly to his feet.

"I didn't like to leave the house without seeing you," said Wilmot, with a good deal of embarrassment. "I suppose you know what Evangeline has been doing."

"She certainly told me what she intended to do," answered Mr. Maitland.

"I particularly wish you to understand," Wilmot continued, "that I am going very unwillingly. I

feel that I have been made a victim. Nothing could have been farther from my intention than to break my engagement."

"There are more ways than one of killing a cat, Norgate," said Mr. Maitland.

"Then you—you think that I have been to blame?" demanded Wilmot.

"The least said the soonest mended. I intend to keep my thoughts to myself."

"If it comes to that," cried Wilmot, "of course I have an uncomfortable feeling that I am forced to appear in a disadvantageous light."

"In such circumstances," said Mr. Maitland, "a man is usually safe in trusting his own judgment."

"It will seem to people who are ignorant of all the ins and outs of the case," Wilmot continued, "that I am breaking the engagement at a moment when honour especially compelled me to stick to it. I can only say there is nothing I desire more than its renewal when the time comes."

"Have you any reason for thinking that such a time will ever come?"

"I try to hope there is little doubt about it," said Wilmot. "I trust this wretched phase may pass——"

"Doesn't it occur to you that its consequences will remain?" suggested Mr. Maitland.

"Upon my soul—no!" exclaimed Wilmot with

considerable energy. "When once Evangeline is herself again, I believe she will see things differently and make allowances which perhaps can scarcely be expected of her just now."

Mr. Maitland shrugged his shoulders, but he did not offer his hand, so that Wilmot turned away with somewhat uncomfortable sensations, opened the smoking-room door and left the house. He did not carry out his intention of going to Devonshire, although he still determined to get away from London at the earliest moment. His rooms in Mount Street had been frequently left to the care of his landlady for months consecutively, and Wilmot's only difficulty concerned the house in South Audley Street.

Before he slept that night, however, he made up his mind. On the whole, reflection convinced him that matters might have taken a worse turn. Always assuming, as he surely had every reason to do, that Evangeline loved him, he felt confident in his ability to gain her complete forgiveness in the fortunate event of her restoration; while it was satisfactory to realise that she would no longer have the remotest claim upon him, if her disfigurement should remain permanent.

Wilmot determined to keep the house and the furniture in South Audley Street intact—at least for the present; and to lose no time in finding

someone to take charge of the place until such time as he knew his destiny.

The following morning brought Wilmot a parcel which he would have preferred not to receive, containing every present and every letter he had sent to Evangeline. These were accompanied by a few lines, beginning "Dear Wilmot," and requesting him to return her own letters to Portman Square.

CHAPTER VIII

TRIMINGSLEY

IT was with curious sensations that Evangeline read again the letters which, for the most part, had been written to Wilmot at a time when she looked forward to become his wife within a few weeks. While she burned them in a fire especially lighted on a hot afternoon in her bedroom, she felt that in a manner she should have had very little reluctance in addressing Wilmot Norgate in similar terms to-day.

It was not that Evangeline, for an instant, began to regret her recent decision ; but, although it remained perfectly true that an obstacle had arisen between Wilmot and herself, her affection for the man on the farther side of the barrier had by no means suddenly died out.

While she had at present, indeed, no wish to marry him, she would have been willing to admit that the deficiency lay in Wilmot rather than in herself. It was not that she had too little love to be his wife, but that his was not of the requisite

quality. Although Evangeline felt extremely indignant, and hurt and disappointed, she could still think of him with an emotion, an ecstasy, such as no one else had ever been able to awaken in her.

Having seen that all the wedding-presents were returned to their donors, not without a sense of humiliation, Evangeline's prevailing wish was now to go away from London and from all her acquaintances, until such time as she could show her face again without reluctance—if ever that day should dawn. The end of the season was at hand, but it seemed impossible to accept any of her numerous country-house invitations; Evangeline longed rather for some secluded spot, where there would be no risk of meeting anyone she knew, where she might live out of doors from morning until night.

Mr. Maitland, who at the present juncture could think of denying her nothing, made a tour of several house-agents' offices, and returned with a list of houses to be let furnished; amongst them one which promised to satisfy all Evangeline's requirements.

"Trimingsley," said her father, "must be a God-forsaken place."

"If that signifies it is forsaken by man, it is just the spot I should like," was the answer.

"Then I suppose I must run down to look at it," said Mr. Maitland, and without any very agreeable anticipations he left home the following morning.

Trimingsley was described as a picturesque fishing-village on the Norfolk coast; it comprised a church, an inn, a few cottages, and one fair-sized house surrounded by a large garden. The village was built on a high cliff, along which one might wander for many miles in either direction without being troubled by one's fellow-creatures. It was four miles from the nearest railway station at South Morden, and, finding he could not very conveniently make the return journey the same day, Mr. Maitland arranged to pass a night at the principal hotel of that sedate town.

As far as the house was concerned, his report on returning to Portman Square proved to be in every way satisfactory. He spoke quite enthusiastically of the bracing air of Trimingsley, of the unsophisticated character of the village, where there did not appear to be the least enticement or accommodation for visitors. It did not contain even a parsonage; the small church (or chapel of ease) being served by a curate from a neighbouring parish.

"It sounds as if it were exactly what we want,"

said Evangeline, when she had listened to her father's detailed report.

"Perhaps," cried Mr. Maitland, "you won't mind telling me how on earth you propose to get rid of the time from morning to night."

"Oh well, I shall take plenty of books to begin with, my paints and my bicycle. You must take yours," Evangeline insisted, "and I shall drag you out for long rides in lonely places where there will be no one to see me."

"How long do you propose to stay?" asked Mr. Maitland. "The people of the house wish to let it for three months—that would make it the beginning of October before we return."

"Three months will do splendidly!" she exclaimed. "As for coming home! I positively refuse to return until the spell is taken off—if ever it is," she added with a sigh.

When all the details had been arranged, and the agreement signed, it is true that Evangeline began to think that perhaps she might find the three months a little monotonous; thus bringing herself into perfect accord with Mr. Maitland. Some of the servants were to be taken and others left at Portman Square, while Mr. Maitland consented to have his bicycle over-hauled before he began his exile.

The owner of the house had arranged for an

omnibus to meet the incoming tenants at South Morden, and when Evangeline first beheld the village of Trimingsley, at five o'clock one afternoon in the early days of July, she at once formed the most favourable opinion. After inspecting the house from ground floor to garret, and having given Mr. Maitland a cup of tea, she insisted on taking him out to explore the immediate neighbourhood.

There was a kind of chine leading down to the sands, and this, continuing inland, formed the only street of which the inhabitants of Trimingsley could boast. It included several neat-looking cottages, a general shop, a small rather uninteresting church on the left, and almost opposite the Anchor Inn.

Standing on the verge of the brown cliff, Evangeline began to rejoice that she had come. She compelled Mr. Maitland to scramble down a rugged path on its sloping face; she took off her hat—there seemed to be no one to see what she did—and felt the fresh breeze on her forehead; very welcome after the close railway compartment in which she had been boxed up for some hours this sultry day.

Evangeline told herself that she was capable of enduring considerable dulness, so that she could go freely about without caring whether anyone

looked at her face, and she tried to settle down at once to a smooth, unbroken routine. After a few days had passed, she thought that she knew every man, woman, and child in the village by sight; although even here she found herself stared at as an object of (doubtless uncanny) interest.

She made friends of some of the fishermen, she spoke to their wives; she lay on the top of the cliff and read and dreamed the hours away; she tried to sketch the cottages and the cliffs; she bathed from a small tent, hired at South Morden and fixed (not without difficulty) by the butler on the sands; she went for long bicycle rides, sometimes alone, sometimes with her father, who in the delightful, still evenings would accompany her on leisurely rambles through the corn-fields.

"Father," she cried at luncheon when they had been there a fortnight, "you may be surprised to hear that we are no longer the only visitors at Trimingsley."

"Who are the others?" asked Mr. Maitland, laying down his knife and fork. "Because, though no doubt the place has a charm of its own, one wouldn't object to a little intellectual conversation now and then."

"I think that is rather too bad!" said Evangeline. "But I don't think I can say he

looks extremely intellectual—I fancy benevolence is more likely his strong point. He can't be anything but a curate. I met him with a pale little woman and ten children—I had the curiosity to count them."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Maitland, as he continued his meal, "there isn't a house in the village capable of holding half the number."

"I can't imagine how they all get in," said Evangeline, "but I rather suspect a miracle. They seem to occupy John Dunn's cottage and the one next-door as well."

Evangeline determined to make the acquaintance of the children at least, and indeed, with an extremely youthful nursemaid whom Evangeline had at first counted as one of the family, they seemed to pervade the place. They had a shabby-genteel appearance, the older boys being obviously clad in their father's adapted garments. One day Evangeline had fixed her easel half-way down the rugged path which led from the top of the cliff to the sands at the bottom, when a little girl of nine stopped to peer over her shoulder.

"Should you like to come and look?" asked Evangeline, without turning, and the child at once shuffled nearer. "Come along," Evangeline added, and she now looked round with a smile of encouragement. But with a frightened yell the little girl

precipitately fled, although the next moment more footsteps could be heard, and, unable to resist the temptation to look again, Evangeline saw the curate dragging the reluctant child back to the easel.

He wore a seedy black frock-coat of a clerical length, and a bent-brimmed straw hat with his college ribbon round the crown. His black trousers were bulgy at the knees, and he had a round face, with dark hair sadly in need of cutting. Nevertheless, there was the indefinable stamp of good-breeding, even if he did not look very wise.

"What a lovely day," cried Evangeline, as he lifted his limp-brimmed straw hat.

"Beautiful—beautiful," was the answer, and he tried to prevent the child from hiding her face against his legs. "I have brought Helen to say how sorry she is for her rudeness," he added.

"I—I was so—so frightened," sobbed Helen.

"Children take such strange fancies into their heads," said Mr. Ramsbottom, "and I am afraid they are not always quite considerate."

"I hope we shall become capital friends by and by," cried Evangeline. "Helen must come with some of her sisters and have tea in my garden." Although a suggestion of strawberries and cream went far to restore the little girl's spirits,

Evangeline folded up her easel and walked away with tingling cheeks.

On reaching the house she went to her own room, and looking in the glass, told herself that she could scarcely wonder at Helen's panic, while, curiously enough, the child's repugnance seemed to furnish to some degree an excuse for Wilmot's. A few days after this encounter, six of the Ramsbottoms were lavishly entertained with strawberries and cream in the garden, and the following afternoon Evangeline brought some news to Mr. Maitland at tea-time.

"I begin to feel really disappointed in Trimming-sley," she exclaimed. "It is becoming crowded. A man has actually arrived at the inn."

"What is he like?" asked Mr. Maitland, who was beginning to pine for human intercourse.

"I only caught a glimpse of him as he was getting out of our omnibus at the door of the Anchor," she answered. "But he has brought a bicycle, although he certainly doesn't look fit to use it."

"An invalid?"

"I should think he must be recovering from a severe illness," said Evangeline.

"Is he young?" asked Mr. Maitland.

"Oh well," was the answer, "I suppose he is two- or three-and-thirty."

"About Norgate's age!" Mr. Maitland suggested, regarding his daughter a little intently.

"Yes, but he looks a very different kind of man from Wilmot," murmured Evangeline, with a blush.

Since her arrival at Trimingsley, she had often wondered what had become of him, and concluded that in all probability he had gone to some of the country-houses to which she also had been invited. Evangeline had not ceased to regard the rupture as irreparable, and while she sometimes speculated concerning her future, Wilmot no longer seemed to have a part in it. And yet she did not attempt to deceive herself; he had occupied a unique place in her life; she was convinced that she could never feel towards any other man as she had felt towards him—as she still felt towards him, for that matter. If she remained perfectly conscious of his shortcomings, and grew bitterly indignant at moments when they were the most distinctly remembered, Evangeline nevertheless regretted the necessity (the extremely painful necessity) which had compelled her to decide against him.

During the ensuing few days the new visitor to Trimingsley engaged a great deal of Evangeline's attention. He was tall and well built, but his homespun jacket hung upon him loosely, "like a giant's

robe upon a dwarfish thief." She came to the conclusion that he was scarcely to be described as a handsome man, but this may have been due to the fact that she disliked a young man to wear a beard. This particular beard, also, was not nicely trimmed like her father's; it had an incipient, unkempt appearance, whilst the short moustache, of a fair brown colour, looked something like a tooth-brush. On his arrival he had been pale and delicate in appearance—interesting in a manner, whilst he seemed to spend his time lounging about the village, talking to the fishermen (whom he supplied with tobacco) or to Ramsbottom, or lying at full length on the top of the cliff; once Evangeline had come upon him asleep in the full glare of the sunshine, and so close to the edge that she felt glad he was awakened by her approach. He had given her the early impression of extreme lassitude and indolence, although she admitted that he possessed a pair of curiously alert blue eyes, which more than once she had found fixed on her face with an interest that struck her as entirely devoid of offence.

With long days to fill, hot lazy days, Evangeline began to watch for him; he soon became one of the incidents of her sojourn at Trimingsley, which to tell the truth was growing not a little monotonous to herself as well as to Mr. Maitland. Her

interest in the man partook of something of a scientific character.

"I feel almost as if I were observing a chick in an incubator," she told her father as they strolled in the garden after dinner one evening.

"It hadn't occurred to me that the fellow needed to grow much more," was the answer.

"Still he seems to be filling out before my eyes," she insisted. "It is positively marvellous. He has not been in Trimingsley much more than ten days, and yet one would scarcely recognise him for the same man whom I saw get out of the omnibus. His coat will soon fit quite nicely."

Gradually Evangeline arrived at the conclusion that she had committed an injustice. She had been wrong in setting him down as indolent, while she marvelled that such trivialities could possess the remotest interest for her—especially in these days. But a continual dropping will wear away a stone, and she continued to meet him so many times every day that it almost seemed that she knew the man. Odd moments were filled by speculations concerning his position in the world; for his movements were now becoming energetic, and the notion gained strength that he could not lack some active occupation.

Presently, beginning to see him less frequently, she wondered what had become of him, until one

afternoon she saw him land on the beach from one of the broad-beamed crab-boats which are common on that coast ; he carried fishing-tackle in one hand and an overflowing rush-bag in the other. More than once she met him about the country on his bicycle, and on these occasions he looked as if he required very little encouragement to induce him to raise his cloth cap ; this little, however, was not forthcoming.

"I am afraid you are beginning to find Trimingsley a little dull," Evangeline remarked to her father after one such meeting. "It would be nice if you had someone to talk to now and then, especially as you don't seem to appreciate Mr. Ramsbottom."

"Well, there's only one alternative to the curate," said Mr. Maitland. "And it's a dreadfully risky thing to let one's self in for anything like an intimacy with no prospect of putting an end to it for a month or two. Besides we haven't the remotest notion who or what the man is."

"His moustache is beginning to grow quite nicely," answered Evangeline.

"*Ex pede Herculem !*" cried her father, leaning back in his chair, with a laugh.

But she could not resist the feeling that she had already a kind of incipient acquaintance with the man, while curiously enough she experienced

little or no reluctance about showing him her face. Before leaving London she had come to the heroic determination to take no more account of her infirmity, and since her arrival at Trimingsley she had ridden freely about the country; even her experience with little Helen Ramsbottom not inducing her to tolerate the inconvenience of a veil.

Although he had seen her at her worst (and Evangeline often wondered whether she should ever now be better) when she was laughing and talking with some of the children of the village, yet something, she knew not what, assured her that she was regarded certainly without repugnance. One afternoon, returning on her bicycle with some books from the scanty library at South Morden, rounding a corner on the wrong side, she very narrowly escaped a cannon, and as he rode on with a smile she saw him lift his cloth cap.

A few days later Evangeline astonished Mr. Maitland by the information that a second guest had arrived at the Anchor.

"Dear me!" he answered, "the landlord must be making a fortune. Who is it this time?"

"Another man," said Evangeline. "He looks rather younger than the first, but that may be only because he shaves. He doesn't wear a

moustache and his mouth has a rather odd expression—a kind of Cupid's bow of a mouth ; with a whimsical look."

"Very interesting," returned Mr. Maitland. "And you seem to be cultivating habits of observation."

"I only saw him at the door as I rode past," she explained. "But I couldn't very well help looking, because he was talking to Mr. Ramsbottom."

"Well they haven't been very long in scraping an acquaintance," cried Mr. Maitland, "and I wish him joy whoever he may be."

His somewhat long, sunburned face had an appearance of good-breeding which, in a manner, the first guest at the inn might almost be said to have lacked. As Evangeline went about the following morning, she kept curious eyes open, expecting to see the two visitors of the Anchor together. During the morning, however, she met neither of them ; and after luncheon, the day being exceedingly hot, she came out on to the cliff with Mr. Maitland, in quest of the breeze which seldom failed there, when suddenly Evangeline touched her father's sleeve.

"There he is," she whispered ; and raising his eyes Mr. Maitland saw, still at a distance, a tall, clean-limbed man apparently about thirty years of

age, with his jacket unbuttoned, strolling towards them with his hands in the pockets of his loose flannel trousers. As he drew level with Evangeline, to her extreme surprise he raised his straw hat.

CHAPTER IX
OWEN FAIRBANK

"THE fellow appears to know you," said Mr. Maitland, as he continued on his way with Evangeline.

"Oh," she exclaimed, with a laugh, "how extremely ridiculous of me!"

"What have you been doing this time?" asked her father.

"Of course it is the same man."

"The same——"

"Only, don't you see, he has shaved off his moustache and beard, and he looks so immensely improved that I didn't recognise him until he bowed."

"I was not aware," said Mr. Maitland drily, "that there had been a formal introduction."

"Oh well," she cried, smiling, "there hasn't. I imagine that he bowed because I almost ran him down the other day—a way of returning good for evil, you understand, father!"

"By the bye," Mr. Maitland suggested a few

moments later, "I had an idea that you came to this forsaken place for complete seclusion."

"So I did."

"Yet you have made up your mind to know a man whose virtue is the purely negative one that he no longer wears a beard and moustache."

It was certainly true that Evangeline thought that it might perhaps be agreeable to have someone besides her father, the fishermen, and the Ramsbottom family, to talk to now and then; but ultimately she succeeded in convincing herself that there was a peculiar inevitableness about her introduction to the guest at the Anchor Inn.

For one morning, a few days after this illuminating stroll on the cliff, Mr. Maitland did not come downstairs to breakfast with his customary punctuality, and when Evangeline presently went to his bedroom door, to inquire whether anything was the matter, she was invited to enter, and found him still in bed with a slight attack of fever. He admitted a restless night, suggesting influenza, and consented, after very little persuasion, to stay where he was for the rest of the day. The following morning Evangeline again carried his breakfast upstairs, and although he insisted that he felt better it appeared obvious that he was not quite well. She could not avoid a little anxiety,

especially as he was seldom indisposed, while she naturally dreaded an illness away from home.

As she had insisted on spending the whole of the previous day indoors on his account, Mr. Maitland sent her out before luncheon, and she had not left the house many minutes when she met the entire Ramsbottom family, and joined their group. For Mrs. Ramsbottom Evangeline had conceived a half-pitying regard; the pale-faced little woman appeared very helpless amidst her tribe of nine children; very grateful for any small thing that might be done for them.

Evangeline made a rule of taking the five girls every morning into her tent, from which they all bathed together, and after the bath she took care to provide them with a good luncheon of sandwiches and milk; their ravenous appetites creating the impression that they seldom had quite enough to eat, in the ordinary way at home. Consequently Evangeline devised ingenious excuses to provide occasional meals without hurting Mrs. Ramsbottom's feelings, until one day, the two women being alone, Mrs. Ramsbottom suddenly seized Evangeline's hand and pressed it, and henceforth there seemed to be an excellent understanding between them.

It was by way of being a fresh experience for Evangeline, and she frequently marvelled at the

change which she could scarcely fail to recognise in herself; not that up to the present she had done anything or deliberately planned to do anything very astounding, yet her aims and interests in life were certainly becoming altered, and she seemed to be gaining a new outlook on the world.

"I don't seem to have seen Mr. Maitland the last day or two," remarked Mrs. Ramsbottom this morning; and the fact could scarcely be wondered at, since he always strove to avoid the curate, whose conversation had a didactic tendency. There seemed to be a sermon in every stone.

"You are not likely to see him to-day," answered Evangeline. "My father is not at all well, and he is staying in bed."

Always interested in any kind of ailment, Mrs. Ramsbottom began to commiserate Evangeline.

"How very fortunate that there should happen to be a doctor in the village just now," she concluded.

"Fortunate," said her husband, pressing down his chin between his collar and his neck, "is scarcely the word I should employ, my dear."

"You must have seen him," cried Mrs. Ramsbottom eagerly. "Dr. Fairbank is staying at the inn—Dr. Owen Fairbank."

"He has himself made the most providential recovery," explained Mr. Ramsbottom. "He got

blood poisoning whilst conducting a post-mortem examination at the hospital a few months ago."

"Is Dr. Fairbank in practice?" inquired Evangeline, with considerable interest.

"I am given to understand," said Mr. Ramsbottom, "that he has an appointment on the staff at St. Martha's Hospital. He seems to be greatly interested in bacteriological research."

"I used to know a girl named Fairbank," answered Evangeline, as she turned away; and, walking slowly back to the house, she began to speculate whether Owen Fairbank could by any possibility be related to her friend Muriel. Evangeline seemed to remember having heard in her childish days of a wonderful cousin who had gained a scholarship at some London hospital, together with other distinctions, although she could not recollect his Christian name. Her interest in Dr. Fairbank naturally quickened, and after luncheon that day she went upstairs to Mr. Maitland's room and repeated what she had recently heard from Mrs. Ramsbottom.

To Evangeline's surprise Mr. Maitland began to smile, thus proving that his condition was certainly no worse.

"I am astounded to find you so unscrupulous," he exclaimed.

"Unscrupulous!"

"You can actually contemplate the atrocity of trading on your father's illness."

"Oh," she protested, flushing slightly, "but I hadn't the slightest idea——"

"My dear child," said Mr. Maitland, "I am certain you had. I am almost well again, but though the steed is stolen that's no reason against locking the stable door. Seriously," he added, "I don't feel quite satisfied about myself, and I think I shall ask Fairbank to have a look at me. You might get him to come some time to-day."

Accordingly Evangeline went downstairs to the morning-room, and wrote a formal note, presenting her compliments to Dr. Fairbank, apologising for troubling him, but begging him to prescribe for her father. Having nothing better to do, she thought she would walk as far as the inn with the letter, but half-way there it happened that she saw Dr. Fairbank riding towards her on his bicycle. In order to attract his attention she came to a standstill in the middle of the road, while he was off his machine in an instant.

"Is there anything I can do?" he asked, lifting his cap.

"I was on my way to the Anchor with a letter for you," she explained; and he held out one hand to take it, while he supported his

bicycle with the other. "Mrs. Ramsbottom," continued Evangeline, "told me you were a doctor, and there is no other nearer than South Morden."

"Is anybody ill?" he asked.

"My father has a sort of feverish attack," she answered. "He seems better this morning, and I don't imagine it can be anything very serious——"

"But naturally you would like me to see him," cried Owen promptly. "Shall I come with you now?"

"Oh, but I am interrupting your ride," she suggested, and he laughed pleasantly.

"One doesn't get a chance of a patient every day in the week," he said, and wheeling his bicycle he accompanied Evangeline towards the house.

On the way she explained that they had hired it until the first week in October, and when they reached the front door, and he had stood his machine against the wall, Evangeline led him upstairs to Mr. Maitland's bedroom. Leaving the doctor alone with his patient, she removed her hat and went downstairs to wait in the morning-room, where her father wrote his letters, smoked, and spent the most of his time indoors; but nearly three-quarters of an hour passed before she heard Owen's footsteps on the stairs.

Intercepting him in the hall, Evangeline could

not help observing his peculiarly keen, alert expression; but although his face had become sunburned during the last few weeks, it still, on a closer inspection, had a slight appearance of delicacy.

Evangeline's intention had been to inquire about the patient in the hall, and then, when she had listened to Owen's instructions, to say good-bye; but, with a glance at the door behind her, he stepped towards it in the most matter-of-fact manner in the world, pushed it farther open, and stood aside for Evangeline to re-enter the room. Then he shifted the position of a chair, and when, amused by his coolness, she felt unable to avoid sitting down, he thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pockets as he stood leaning against the leather-topped table.

"I don't think you need feel very anxious about Mr. Maitland," he said.

"Oh, I don't feel anxious in the least," cried Evangeline.

"Still," continued Owen cheerfully, "he will be all the better for a dose, and I happen to have some tabloids which I will bring by and by. As a matter of precaution I shall keep him under observation for a day or two, but I fancy he will soon be all right again."

"Thank you very much," said Evangeline; and

then, not without a little embarrassment, she took out her purse.

"Oh, we needn't bother about anything of that sort," he exclaimed, with a laugh, staring down at her hands. "This is a holiday task, you know."

"You—you have yourself been ill," she suggested, relieved to put aside the question of the fee. It would be more convenient for him to discuss the matter with her father later on.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

"Oh well, there are not very many objects of interest in Trimingsley."

"I am glad if I was one," answered Owen.

"It was rather entertaining to watch your development," she said; and thinking he looked as if he intended to stay the rest of the day, she added, "When you shaved off your beard, I thought you must be someone else."

"I let it grow during my illness," he explained. Rather coolly, as Evangeline thought, he stretched out his arm and took from the table one of her own photographs, which Mr. Maitland had brought from Portman Square. As it made an undeniably agreeable picture, Evangeline began to wonder whether he would succeed in identifying it.

"Should you have known it was intended for

me?" she could not resist inquiring, after he had examined the photograph a few moments.

"Oh dear, yes," he answered. "When your face is in complete repose the left side is really very little altered. And besides," Owen added, "one naturally tried to see behind the mask—if you don't mind my putting it in that way."

"But don't you think that would be rather difficult at a casual glance?" she suggested, pleased, nevertheless, by the idea.

"Many a mickle makes a muckle," answered Owen. "You must remember that I have seen you on the average about three times a day since my arrival at Trimingsley. Now," he continued, still holding the photograph in his right hand, as he stood leaning against the table in a peculiarly easy attitude, while he gazed down at her head, "suppose you saw anyone walking about the place with his face always hidden—by an umbrella, or something of that sort——"

"No doubt I should feel extremely curious to obtain a peep beneath it!"

"Far more interesting to learn what lies behind a face exposed in the ordinary way," said Owen.

"In the ordinary way," returned Evangeline, "I don't fancy people trouble to think of what may lie behind."

"Don't they?" he cried, returning the photo-

graph to the table. "Now, that seems to me one of the most fascinating things in life: to get behind phenomena. You see a tree, and you know that certain light-rays are reflected on your retina and so forth, but it's surely impossible to help marvelling what constitutes the thing in itself. And the same with humans—trees walking, you know—with the important difference that they deliberately complicate matters. You," he continued, with a smile, "will be marvelling what it is within me that has the effrontery to detain you all this time! I will let you have the tabloids, and you must keep Mr. Maitland in bed until I have seen him at about ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

After Owen had remounted his bicycle at the front door, and ridden away towards the Anchor Inn, Evangeline felt that his visit had had an invigorating, tonic effect on herself as well as on her father; and although she did not see Owen when he brought the promised tabloids, she thought a great deal about what he had said. Here was a man who could treat her disfigurement in a cool, sensible manner, although she perceived that only the fact that he had come to the house in his professional capacity permitted any reference to her condition. It happened, however, that at the outset he had struck a responsive chord, and as the day wore on

Evangeline found it impossible to refrain from wishing that Wilmot Norgate had displayed something of Dr. Fairbank's eagerness to penetrate behind certain phenomena.

She welcomed Owen cordially on his arrival at ten o'clock the following morning, which he seemed quite prepared to spend at the house. After a long time with Mr. Maitland upstairs, and having given his patient permission to leave his bed after luncheon, Owen descended to the hall and tapped at the door of the room where he had talked to Evangeline the previous day. It had a low window, which opened temptingly on to the large, shady garden.

"A warm morning," cried Owen, when Evangeline had invited him to enter. "Is there any insurmountable reason why we shouldn't talk out of doors?"

"I know of none," she answered, with a laugh, and she led the way into the garden, where they strolled to and fro on the grass. She soon discovered his deficiency in small talk, and yet, on the other hand, Owen never seemed to remain long without speaking; a tree, a cloud, any casual object furnished a text—certainly not to preach upon, but to discuss perhaps only half seriously. Evangeline perceived that he could not trifle with nothing, or blow conversational bubbles like many

of the men she knew, and one consequence was that she thought she gained an extraordinarily rapid insight into his character.

"Once upon a time," she suggested, when her father's indisposition had been fully discussed, and Owen had already been a long while in the garden, "I had a schoolfellow of your name."

"My cousin Maude?" he asked.

"I used to know Maude Fairbank," she answered, "but her sister Muriel was my great friend. I don't remember seeing you at her wedding," Evangeline added.

"I happened to be at a hospital in Paris at the time," he explained.

"I was one of her bridesmaids," said Evangeline; and now she felt that Dr. Fairbank had duly presented his credentials, and that there was no reason why the acquaintance should not be cultivated; especially as Mr. Maitland seemed to be quite unusually impressed in Owen's favour. The natural result was an invitation to dinner a few days later, by which time the patient had been perfectly restored to health; and Owen accepted on the condition that he might wear his morning clothes.

"I came to Trimingsley to rusticate," he explained, "and I hadn't the slightest expectation of meeting anybody I knew." As he spoke his eyes

met Evangeline's, and she could not help smiling. "Oh well," Owen added, "of course I really didn't know you, did I?"

As he was connected with Muriel Fairbank, it seemed safe to assume (and Mr. Maitland recognised the necessity to think of such matters) that he was amply provided with this world's goods; all the Fairbanks were fairly well-to-do, and Mr. Maitland soon learned that it formed no part of Owen's plans to go in for private practice. He intended, rather, to devote himself to scientific research.

After his first dinner with the Maitlands, scarcely a day was allowed to pass without his spending some hours in their company; and indeed it was not very easy for visitors to Trimingsley to avoid frequent meetings. In the present case it soon became evident to Mr. Maitland that Owen spared no opportunity of throwing himself in Evangeline's way.

The three boated, bicycled, walked and (especially) talked together; Owen undoubtedly proving an immense acquisition to Mr. Maitland. While he smoked on the lawn after dinner, and discussed the affairs of this world and the next with Owen Fairbank, Evangeline had the satisfaction of seeing that her father's contentment was well-nigh complete, none the less because the two

men appeared to take diametrically opposite sides on every conceivable subject.

Mr. Maitland was apt occasionally to grow warm in debate, but Owen would lean back in his hammock-chair with his long legs outstretched, while he enunciated the most startling theories with all the coolness in the world. It became almost inevitable that, as the time went on, Evangeline should institute a comparison between her present companion and Wilmot Norgate, although it was true there seemed to be very few points of resemblance.

While few girls of her age had met more men, or received greater admiration, she had never before found herself on precisely the same footing with anyone. She had never, since she "came out" on her eighteenth birthday, lived such a simple life; and latterly it had seemed far from being empty. One characteristic of her intimacy with Owen Fairbank (for it was beginning to amount to an intimacy) had an intense gratification for Evangeline. He had sought her companionship in spite of her deformity, and so entirely at ease had he set her in this regard, that she often forgot when they were together that anything was seriously amiss. Although Owen had not enjoyed an opportunity to see her at her best, save in photographs, it was perfectly obvious that he did not

experience the least inclination to shrink from her. It became natural, therefore, to conclude that he had been attracted rather by those mental and moral qualities which Wilmot Norgate counted of such slight importance.

It may be that Evangeline made a little too much of the difference between the men, and if she had known Owen Fairbank a few years instead of a few weeks she might have perceived that he was quite sufficiently human.

Not having seen her at her best, it followed that he could scarcely be disappointed at her transformation. As a matter of fact, he had not been aware of her existence that day she first saw him enter the Anchor Inn, and, when he encountered her the following afternoon on the cliff, Evangeline's back was turned towards him.

She was standing erect, her right hand raised to shade her eyes as she gazed out seawards, so that he saw the curves of her superb shape to the best advantage; he noticed the short tresses of fair hair blown about by the breeze, and slackened his pace in the hope that she might turn before he passed by. Her left cheek was first presented, and on obtaining a fuller view of her face he understood at once what had happened.

Such cases were familiarities of his practice, and although he had met with some which had been

permanent, there appeared no reason to anticipate the worst as far as this girl was concerned. Owen regarded her disfigurement as a merely passing phase, and immediately began to imagine what she would look like in her normal condition.

For the rest, Evangeline may not have been far wrong in her estimate of the manner of his attraction ; but, however this might be, her own regard for Owen was as different from her earlier liking for Wilmot as the atmosphere of the room where she had been introduced to the one man was different from the breezy air of Trimingsley, where she had first seen the other.

With Wilmot, even at the zenith of their intimacy, she had never experienced that sense of level companionship and frank communion such as she enjoyed daily with Owen. On the other hand, her present friendship absolutely lacked the touch of emotion which still seemed to linger fragrantly about the memory of her *fiancé*. And strangely enough, Evangeline had thought of Wilmot more frequently as her comradeship with Owen gained strength.

CHAPTER X

A HINT FOR OWEN

WHILST the visit to Trimingsley had brought Evangeline some satisfaction, she was growing, in one respect, more and more disappointed. Although it seemed a long time since the morning she awoke to find herself hideous, there was as yet not the slightest amelioration of her disfigurement; and, as the days passed, she began seriously to fear that this might be destined to endure for the remainder of her life.

But one delightful afternoon, after a long morning's ride through silent lanes in the sunshine, Owen, having easily been prevailed upon to return with Mr. Maitland to luncheon, was sitting with Evangeline in the garden, when presently he rose and stood looking down somewhat fixedly at her face. Mr. Maitland, pleading the absolute necessity to write some very urgent letters, had retired to his favourite room, lain down on the sofa by the open window, and straightway fallen asleep; Evangeline was reclining lazily in one of

the hammock-chairs on the lawn, while Owen appeared to be even more alert and wide-awake than usual.

"Do you mind telling me," he asked, standing close to her knees, "how long this sort of thing has been troubling you?"

"Since the second week in June," she answered, not a little astonished at the abrupt question. "It seems like a lifetime," she added, with a sigh.

"I wish you would try to close your eyes for a moment," said Owen, and putting back her head in order to afford him a fuller view of her face. Evangeline obeyed with great docility.

"Well?" she exclaimed, opening them the next instant.

"Didn't Weston ever ask you to try to shut your eyes?"

"Oh yes, but I couldn't succeed."

"You can to-day—or very nearly," said Owen; and then Evangeline suddenly rose to her feet, in a condition of intense excitement.

"Do you—do you really mean to tell me that I—that I am beginning to get better?" she demanded with a tremor in her voice.

"I fancied that there was a slight improvement a week ago," he returned.

"Oh!" she cried reproachfully, "why ever didn't you say so?"

"Well, I was half afraid of raising false hopes. I made myself wait until I was more certain."

"Are—are you certain now?" she asked eagerly.

"I haven't the remotest doubt that you are distinctly better than the day I first saw you," he answered ; and, as he returned to his chair and sat down, Evangeline walked a few paces across the grass, keeping her face steadily averted. Suspecting that she wept, Owen turned his back, taking a pipe from his pocket and making a long business of loading and lighting it.

"If only you are right," she murmured, coming back to his side presently, "I can't possibly tell you how thankful I shall be."

"I feel absolutely convinced," he assured her.

"You—you think that I shall really get quite well again?" she persisted.

"There's not the slightest reason to doubt it," he answered ; and circumstances certainly appeared to be working in Owen's favour, since Evangeline found it difficult to dissociate the beneficent discovery from him who had announced it. He still stayed some time in the garden, but, when he at last bade her good-bye, Evangeline re-entered the house, ran swiftly upstairs to her own room, and having locked the door scrutinised her face in the looking-glass. A quarter of an hour later

she rang for Biggs, and standing with her head thrown back, her hands hanging at her sides, demanded the maid's opinion.

"Now I come to look I do believe there is an improvement," said Biggs; and after another long inspection of her reflection in the glass, Evangeline went downstairs to the morning-room, where she found Mr. Maitland, recently awakened from his siesta and waiting a little impatiently for his afternoon tea.

"Father," she exclaimed, running eagerly towards him, and resting her hands upon his shoulders, "such splendid news!"

"You can tell me while we have tea," said Mr. Maitland.

"Dr. Fairbank thinks I am beginning to get well—really to get quite well," she faltered.

"There is no question that Fairbank ought to know," answered Mr. Maitland.

"Oh yes," said Evangeline, "he has seen lots of cases——"

"Besides he has had such ample opportunity for observation."

"Please," urged Evangeline, with a blush, "please tell me what you think, father!"

"Well, let me have a good look at you," said Mr. Maitland; and Evangeline stepped backwards, clasping her hands behind her, standing with the

sunshine falling through the open window on to her face.

"I had put it down to familiarity," he exclaimed, after a few minutes' anxious silence.

"Then you had noticed——"

"Why, yes," was the answer. "I fancied last week there might be a little improvement. And now you must go along and prosper. But first of all," he added, passing, as Evangeline thought, from the sublime to the ridiculous, "for goodness' sake let us have some tea."

Her spirits rose to a remarkable degree as henceforth every day appeared to make a difference for the better. It was inevitable that she should think a great deal about herself during this period, and almost as much about Wilmot Norgate. At the least she became conscious of a desire that he should have an opportunity to witness her complete restoration. She looked forward to the scene as one of triumph for herself, rather than as retaliative upon him, and certainly without any idea of renewing her engagement. The rupture had been final in her estimation if not in Wilmot's; she had, she told herself, gained a fresh insight of his real character and found it distinctly wanting. But, as he had shrunk from her, she could not now resist a longing to appear before him again in all her former radiance.

"You know," she said to Owen one afternoon when they were strolling on the cliff, "I feel immensely rebellious and impatient. I should have liked to get well as suddenly as I became ill."

"An ascent is usually more difficult," he suggested. "Besides, you ought to consider the feelings of others."

"There don't seem to be very many others in Trimingsley," cried Evangeline.

"Still the most insignificant human creatures require a little mercy. Consider the shock of such an abrupt transformation."

"Then," said Evangeline, with a great deal of feeling, "what a—a shock it must have been to—to those who knew me, when the first change took place. It must have been enough to disgust anybody."

"Can you imagine yourself feeling anything approaching disgust in similar circumstances?" Owen demanded.

"Oh, but then I suppose a woman always sees things differently from a man," she answered.

"No doubt; but still we are all made up of a blend of our fathers and mothers, you know. There's something of the woman in every man, and something of the man in every woman. But anyhow," Owen continued, "surely it's a little

morbid to think that any of your friends can have experienced the faintest sense of disgust ! ”

Evangeline soon began to look almost herself again, except when she smiled. There may have remained the very slightest distortion, but undoubtedly she was rapidly coming to her own again, and the effect on one person became plain to such few observers as there were in Trimingsley. Owen Fairbank had come to the village to recruit after a long and severe illness, with nothing farther from his thoughts than matrimony ; but gradually, as his intimacy with Evangeline developed, he began to think that he had found his mate, and this at a time when her face was still as grotesque as it had been during those weeks when Wilmot Norgate had turned from her with undisguised repugnance.

But for Owen her temporary condition scarcely counted, or perhaps it even made him feel a little more sympathetic ; while nevertheless he longed to see her as he could imagine she used to look, as he hoped she would look again. When, however, Evangeline was becoming restored to something approaching her normal condition, he found it difficult any longer to consider with his customary coolness the advantages and disadvantages of the marriage state. He resembled Wilmot, at least, in his desire to make Evangeline his wife at the earliest possible moment, nor could he entertain

much doubt concerning his ultimate success. Of Wilmot's existence he had never heard, whilst it did not occur to him that a girl as beautiful as Evangeline Maitland could scarcely have reached her twenty-second year without finding aspirants to her hand.

With consummate diplomacy, Owen had already gone out of his way to enlighten Mr. Maitland concerning his position, with which little fault could be found ; and now that he was beginning to feel strong enough to resume his work at the hospital, it seemed that the time had come to put his fate to the touch.

He anticipated little difficulty in finding the desired opportunity, and having an engagement to dine with Mr. Maitland one evening, about a week before the day fixed for his return to London, Owen formed his plans accordingly. It was a remarkably fine day, with every promise of a glorious night ; the moon was almost at the full, and it would be shining on the garden after dinner, when he would take care to hasten over his usual cigar and afterwards to beguile Evangeline out of doors.

Never had Owen Fairbank admired her so fervently as when she received him in the drawing-room that evening ; and, as if she revelled in the recovery of her charms, she appeared eager to exert upon him their full power. She had dressed with

more elaborateness than she had hitherto ventured upon at Trimingsley; she seemed to be in gayer spirits; and when, after a merry meal, Evangeline rose from the table, Owen became the prey of a quite unaccustomed nervousness. As soon as she had gone, Mr. Maitland led the way to the morning-room, and as Owen lighted the smallest cigar he could select he heard music in the drawing-room. Ten minutes later, however, the pianoforte became silent, and he caught glimpses of Evangeline's white dress as she strolled to and fro along the gravel-path in the moonlight.

Mr. Maitland, leaning back on the sofa, perceived that his guest seemed disinclined to talk (for once in his experience), and as Owen's eyes continually wandered towards the open window, Mr. Maitland also looked in that direction and saw his daughter passing and repassing.

Like Evangeline, Mr. Maitland had developed something approaching an intimacy with Owen, although in the ordinary course of things in London it might have required years to reach the same stage. Mr. Maitland realised that there are many ways of love, and that Owen, for all his apparent coolness, might easily be as inflammable as Wilmot Norgate. As long as Evangeline remained disfigured, the question had scarcely come within the sphere of practical politics; and indeed he had very little

doubt that she still entertained an affection for Wilmot. Stretching out his right arm towards the table, Mr. Maitland took up the photograph which Owen had examined on his first visit to the house.

"This," he remarked, holding it so that Owen might see, and speaking in his most casual tone, "is becoming something like again."

"Only that it isn't half good enough," was the enthusiastic answer.

"I suppose," Mr. Maitland continued, "you would say that Evangeline has practically recovered."

"Yes, practically," said Owen; and after a short pause he added, "It must have been an immense trial for Miss Maitland."

"For that matter," returned Mr. Maitland more significantly, "her illness may be said to have changed the whole course of her life."

"Temporarily," suggested Owen.

"Ah, well, that remains to be proved," said Mr. Maitland. "She was within a fortnight of her wedding-day, you know."

Mr. Maitland's opinion of Owen rose considerably within the next few moments. For an instant, it is true, his face became clouded, but the next he seemed to have recovered his customary self-possession. He could still see Evangeline's white dress as she passed and repassed the open window in the moonlight.

"No," he said quietly ; " I hadn't the least idea of it."

"But for her wretched illness," answered Mr. Maitland, cruel to be kind, "she would have been married on the twenty-fifth of June."

Owen stared down at the tip of his cigar.

"Then," he suggested quietly, "I understand that Miss Maitland is engaged to be married?"

"Oh dear no! her engagement came to an end before we left home."

"Surely," Owen could not help exclaiming, as he remembered certain words of hers, "it wasn't broken off on account of her illness?"

"Well, yes," said Mr. Maitland ; "though it was she who took the initiative. It is true that Norgate showed his—his disappointment a little openly, but still I honestly believe he was fond of her—in his way. If it comes to that, I daresay he is fond of her even now. Evangeline naturally resented his demeanour and dismissed him, but he assured me that he admitted nothing like finality, and it's inevitable that they should meet again sooner or later after our return to London."

"And you—you suspect that the breach will be healed?" asked Owen, as he caught another glimpse of her figure in the garden.

"Ah," cried Mr. Maitland, with a smile which seemed rather incongruous to Owen, "now you are

putting a conundrum! But I should say it is about even betting."

The two men smoked in silence for a few minutes, each understanding the other; then Owen put aside the stump of his cigar and slowly rose from his chair.

"I shall ask you to make my apologies to Miss Maitland," he said. "I feel rather like turning in early to-night."

"Let me see," asked Mr. Maitland; "when have you arranged to leave Trimingsley?"

"I have another week," answered Owen; and the next minute he was outside on the cliff, without having enjoyed that stroll in the garden upon which he had counted. But, after the totally unexpected revelation, Owen could not fail to perceive the desirability of reconsidering his plans. Instead of returning to the inn by the nearest way, he walked on beyond the village by the edge of the cliff, conscious of a very bitter disappointment; but although he wished that he had been earlier enlightened, he perceived that in any event the result would probably have been the same. Nor did he yet feel entirely certain that his case was hopeless; this was what he wished to think about before he returned to the Anchor.

The alertness of Owen's manner was not indicative of haste or impulsiveness; he was a

trained scientific observer : laborious, patient, painstaking ; not the man to yield without a struggle. He warned himself, sagely, to put aside feeling for the present and to treat the matter in the desirable light of common-sense. His object was to induce Evangeline to marry him, but if she still cared for Norgate it was naturally foredoomed to failure. Concerning the man himself, Owen formed a pronounced opinion, setting him down in fact as a particularly mean and despicable sort of scoundrel.

Still Owen Fairbank had sufficient experience of life to be aware that men are not loved, even by the best of women, in proportion to their virtue, and that a girl's heart is not invariably regulated by the kindness of her treatment. Without undue vanity, Owen thought he might assume that Evangeline entertained towards himself a sincere friendliness, although this might not be akin to the kind of love which he desired. Still, she had certainly not avoided him, whereas she had shown no tendency to coquetry until, perhaps, the last few days ; when it had made her more irresistible than ever.

On the whole, as he once more set his face towards Trimingsley at a little past midnight, wondering whether he should succeed in gaining admittance to the inn, which was still some miles distant, Owen came to the conclusion that

Evangeline's mind was probably in a state of flux ; that whilst Norgate had the advantage and the disadvantage of his past record, she had not at present decided on his reinstatement. It was, in fact, anybody's race, and for his own part Owen had no mind to give in until the entire course had been run.

He determined to see her to-morrow, when, if he did not actually ask her to be his wife, he would at least try to induce her to discuss the personal question with the same freedom and candour which had been given to less interesting topics.

On reaching the inn, he found that the landlord had gone to bed, leaving his wife to sit up for the belated guest, whose absence until past one o'clock in the morning had given rise to not a little anxiety.

CHAPTER XI

CONFIDENCES

AS far as Mr. Maitland was concerned, he would not have been displeased to see Evangeline married to Owen Fairbank, after a suitable time had elapsed, and if he had suspected Owen's intention to tempt fortune that evening he might have abstained from his somewhat ungracious, but, as it seemed, necessary, task.

In that event Evangeline would either have put a summary end to the affair by refusing Owen, or she would have found it incumbent to tell him of Wilmot Norgate's former relation to herself. Mr. Maitland, however, had not imagined that matters had developed quite so fast, and accordingly it had seemed no less than his duty to caution Owen before he left Trimingsley.

A consciousness of personal imperfection often hindered Mr. Maitland from exacting too much from his fellows, and, but for a feeling of this character, he might have endeavoured some time ago to remove Evangeline from Wilmot's influence

before he asked her to become his wife. Mr. Maitland reminded himself, however, that Norgate was no worse than the most of the men whom she met day after day, whom she danced with night after night, although he clung to the opinion that in fit hands his daughter was capable of proving better than the average woman.

Yet being convinced that she had given her heart, perhaps irrecoverably, to Wilmot, Mr. Maitland had sincerely regretted Norgate's failure under the ordeal of Evangeline's transformation. Even to-night, after Owen Fairbank's departure, as Evangeline continued to pass and repass the open window, Mr. Maitland wondered whether, while waiting to be joined in the moonlight by the one man, her thoughts were dwelling romantically on the other. Rising presently from the sofa, Mr. Maitland stepped through the window and advanced to his daughter's side.

"What a tremendously long sitting to-night!" she exclaimed. "You must have settled all the affairs of the nation some time ago! What has become of Dr. Fairbank?" she asked, surprised, and doubtless a little disappointed, that he did not follow her father.

"He asked me to make his apologies, and to say he wished to turn in early."

"Isn't he well?" she asked.

"I can't say it struck me that there was much the matter with him."

"Oh, but you forget he has been at death's door," answered Evangeline quickly. "He got blood-poisoning at the hospital, and sometimes I fancy he hasn't perfectly recovered yet."

"My dear girl," said Mr. Maitland, "I haven't the least objection to your making a martyr of the fellow if you have an inclination that way."

Evangeline laughed happily.

"Surely no man was ever much less like a martyr," she exclaimed.

"Oh well, if it comes to that," answered Mr. Maitland, "I am not quite certain. By the bye, you didn't think it desirable to let him know there was such a person as Wilmot Norgate in the world!"

"Was it likely?" she cried, with a crimson face. "Besides," she added the next moment, "how did you discover I hadn't told him?"

"I realised that my parental duty necessitated a word in season," said Mr. Maitland, "and it seemed obvious that Fairbank was—well, a little astonished."

For a few minutes Evangeline walked by her father's side in silence. Perhaps it was scarcely possible for any woman who had seen as much of a man as she had lately seen of Owen, not to trifle (at least) with the idea of him as a possible

husband. Still, she had not gone the length of imagining that he would ask her to be his wife during his stay at Trimingsley, even if he should proceed to such an extremity in any other part of the world.

"Was the parental duty especially urgent this evening?" she inquired.

"Ah well, I suppose there's no woman in existence without some share of coquetry," said Mr. Maitland.

"Anyhow," Evangeline retorted, "you can't blame me for having a very large share lately."

"I should as soon think of blaming a bird for its fine feathers or its musical note," was the answer. "But still," Mr. Maitland continued, "it occurred to me that Fairbank might fancy he had reason to blame us for keeping him in the dark."

"Oh then, it was for—for his sake you spoke!" she suggested.

"As to that you must search your own heart," said Mr. Maitland, with a smile; and although she refrained from pursuing the subject at the moment, Evangeline did indeed make the attempt in her own room later that night, striving after perfect honesty. But the memory of her former love for Wilmot Norgate seemed to afford the only criterion

of her regard for Owen. She was assuredly not carried away by that ecstatic affection which might have rendered calm consideration impossible, whilst yet she could conceive the certainty of a tranquil future by Owen's side; of a comradeship, an equal companionship, such as she had never experienced with Wilmot, the recollection of whom quickened her pulse as Dr. Fairbank's presence had never done.

She felt confident that, after his conversation with Mr. Maitland, Owen would insist on some kind of explanation before he left Trimingsley. Having heard about her engagement, he was the kind of man to inquire why he had not earlier been told of it—as if she could have told him! She smiled as she tried to picture Owen as a lover instead of the excellent friend he had been; Evangeline smiled and then she sighed, wondering whether the friendship was now coming to an end.

She made no attempt to avoid the encounter, perceiving, for one reason, that Owen would prove a difficult man to hinder. He saw her the following morning as she came up the rugged path on the face of the cliff, fresh from the sea, and, when she reached the top, he raised his cap in silence, continuing his way by her side.

When she turned her steps homewards, he followed her into the hall, suggesting that she

might spare a few minutes in the garden. Having left him alone while she went upstairs to tend her hair after her swim, Evangeline soon reappeared, with a smile on her lips (and Evangeline's smile had now ceased to be anything resembling a disfigurement), with her head erect as if she were already putting herself on the defensive—she scarcely knew why.

"Are you beginning to rejoice at the prospect of getting back to your work at the hospital?" she asked, taking one of the garden-chairs.

"Oh well, there are a few things one will miss," answered Owen, sitting down by her side; "though I am hoping you will let me come to see you in London."

"My father would be immensely disappointed if you didn't come," she said.

"Still, it won't be quite the same, will it?" he suggested.

"What will make the difference?"

"For one thing, I am warned that the present phase must be regarded as a kind of interregnum," said Owen; and for once Evangeline felt a little vexed with Mr. Maitland, wishing that he had confined himself to the actual facts of the case. To tell Owen about her recent engagement to Wilmot was unobjectionable—it might indeed have been desirable; but she deprecated any attempt to fore-

cast a future which seemed far from certain to herself.

"I am afraid my father has been telling tales," she exclaimed.

"A story with a moral!" suggested Owen; and Evangeline stared down at the grass at her feet.

"What was the moral?" she demanded.

"Ah well, I suppose that must be a matter for individual interpretation."

"Then you prefer not to tell me yours!"

"On the contrary," he returned, "I came here last night with the firm determination to tell you everything about myself."

"Oh!" cried Evangeline, forcing a laugh, "but that must be such a long story."

"It can be summed up in three words," said Owen. "I haven't the slightest doubt you know them perfectly well already."

"So that there can be no need to go in for vain repetition," she answered.

Owen leaned forward in his chair, balancing his walking-stick on his forefinger, and watching its movements as if he were interested in nothing else in the world.

"I am not very clever at this kind of thrust and parry," he said.

"A plain, blunt man!" exclaimed Evangeline.

"Although I have no wish to pile up the agony," he continued, "I can't talk as if there were nothing serious on earth. If we haven't known each other very long, you have become the central fact of my existence. You have talked to me freely about most subjects, and I was idiot enough to imagine I had heard all the important experiences of your life. Yet from first to last there has been a kind of Bluebeard's chamber of which you have kept the key."

"Oh, but I assure you," said Evangeline, "that I haven't been the cause of anybody's death; and surely you didn't suppose I could discuss that—that sort of thing."

"I was incapable of imagining the existence of that—that sort of thing," he answered. "And even now I am almost as much in the dark as ever. I should immensely like to be enlightened."

"But—but I understood," cried Evangeline, "that—that my father——"

"I think far too highly of you," Owen interrupted, still paying apparent attention to his walking-stick, "to believe you capable of bidding me good-bye and never giving me another thought; although, of course, it doesn't follow that you can give me all I want."

"Still," she said, with an air of badinage, "one

can't be expected to lay bare one's heart, you know!"

"I am not suggesting a serious operation," he returned—"only a harmless auscultation. If you say it will hurt, I have done; but that need surely be the only hindrance."

Evangeline had received offers of marriage before she met Wilmot Norgate, and she could not help thinking that she was on the point of receiving another from Owen this morning, but his method was certainly new in her experience. She could not, however, assert with any degree of truth that his process promised to be painful; while, curiously enough, she was conscious of no disinclination to speak to him even on a subject so intimate as her relation to Wilmot Norgate.

"I came here last night," Owen continued, "intending to ask you to be my wife; and, like a member of parliament who wishes to make a personal explanation, I must still put myself in order by winding up with a resolution."

"There is not the least necessity to—to do that," she answered promptly.

"Before I succeeded in getting my opportunity," he said, "Mr. Maitland went a good deal out of his way to tell me you had been within a fortnight of—of your wedding-day."

"Well, that is perfectly true," Evangeline admitted,

with a sigh which Owen found considerable difficulty in interpreting.

"Although Mr. Maitland didn't put it in so many words," continued Owen, still carefully balancing his walking-stick on his forefinger, "he certainly hinted that the breach might not improbably be healed."

"There I fancy you must have made a mistake," she murmured. "I am as free as the wind."

Owen's walking-stick fell on to the grass at his feet, and he looked with sudden eagerness into her face. Evangeline perceived a fresh quality in his own.

"Then will you marry me?" he asked; but she slowly shook her head.

"No," she answered.

"That sounds rather uncompromising," he exclaimed, "but still I can't get rid of the notion that you love me—in a way."

"Should you be contented to be loved by your —by your wife, in a way?" she asked.

"I should not be contented to marry you if you continued to care for any other man," answered Owen; "but short of that I feel disposed to pick up the crumbs of love that fall from your table. And," he continued, "I don't fancy you would repent the experiment. I feel confident you would be happy with me."

"Oh," cried Evangeline, facing him suddenly, her cheeks aglow, "I think that any woman would be happy with you."

Owen leaned forward, holding out his right hand towards her.

"Then risk it and come to me!" he urged; but again Evangeline shook her head.

"Though it seems an age," she murmured, "it is not very long ago that I was living in the expectation of marrying Wilmot, and—and—Oh!" she broke off suddenly, "it is difficult to discuss."

"You regret having sent him away?" asked Owen, after a short silence.

"Even if that were the fact," exclaimed Evangeline, "you can scarcely imagine I should admit it."

Owen stooped to pick up his walking-stick from the grass.

"Still," he said, in his usual calm, friendly manner, "let us try to thresh the thing out. If we are not destined to be married, you must go as far as to confess that we stop only at that."

"There are shades of feeling which one scarcely understands one's self," said Evangeline, "to say nothing of attempting to describe them to another person."

"Then," Owen persisted, "you are afraid that when you meet Norgate again——"

"I am afraid," she retorted, "that I have no business to be talking to you in this way."

"Oh yes, I think you have," he exclaimed. "It is certain that my happiness hangs in the balance—perhaps yours also. The fact seems to be that you can tolerate the idea of living with me, but that the spectre of your other experience frightens you from making the experiment. Isn't that about how it stands?" he asked.

"If you cannot see," she answered, "I could never make you, and I certainly have no intention to try. There seem to be thoughts one can't express in a phrase. You can't say it is this or it is that; but you have to get light from a word here and there, and to do your best by flashes. We will not talk about it any more," she cried, rather abruptly.

"I still have permission to come to see you in London," Owen suggested.

Evangeline hesitated for a few moments.

"Unless you think it would be wiser to stay away," she said.

"I shall yield to folly with my eyes open," cried Owen, and then rising from his chair he offered his hand. Imagining that he would shorten his stay at Trimingsley, and that she was not likely

to see him again until after her own return to London, she raised a pair of kindly eyes to his face, and when he had left the garden she stared at the door through which he had passed with curiously perplexed sensations.

Keeping her seat, she tried to look into the future, while as for the present, it appeared to be true, as Owen had suggested, that she might indeed have promised to marry him but for the ghost of her past love for Wilmot Norgate. And Evangeline felt confident that such a promise would never have caused her a moment's repentance.

Her knowledge of Owen made her less disposed than she had ever been to condone Wilmot's conduct, since she could easily imagine the vastly different treatment she would have received from Dr. Fairbank at the time of her terrible transformation. She could quite easily imagine, indeed, the different "atmosphere" which would pervade her whole life if it were shared by him.

And yet, as Evangeline sat where Owen had left her, she could not prevent her thoughts from wandering back farther and farther to the days before she came to Trimingsley, before he had entered into her life; and she perceived with fresh distinctness that what had passed between herself

and Wilmot placed her former lover apart from every other man. The memory of those emotions became, as it were, a measure of love, and thus tested she assured herself that she was unable to give to Owen what alone could justify her in becoming his wife.

CHAPTER XII

THE RETURN TO LONDON

EVANGELINE felt compelled, after a little hesitation, to tell Mr. Maitland something about what had passed between herself and Owen Fairbank, and although he did not give utterance to any criticism of her conduct she perceived that the subject was much on his mind that afternoon.

"Of course," he remarked, later in the day, "it's impossible not to draw one's own conclusions from what you were telling me."

"They are very likely to be mistaken, father!"

"It is possible to say now," he continued, "what one scarcely cared to suggest before. You have never looked bonnier! Nobody would believe there had been anything the matter with you such a little while ago. Evangeline is herself again! and that being the case it won't hurt your feelings to be told——"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I quite understand that my face was enough to give anyone a nightmare."

"The recognition of the fact inclines you to charity?" suggested Mr. Maitland.

"Towards Wilmot, you mean?"

"Yes," said Mr. Maitland.

"You think that he had a very good excuse for shrinking from me!"

"My dear child," was the answer, "you mustn't misunderstand me. I don't hold a brief for Norgate—far from it. I thought, and I still think, the fellow acted abominably, but——"

"Dr. Fairbank did not shrink from me," cried Evangeline, a little eagerly.

"Fairbank stands on a different level," said her father. "It is useless to expect grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. I make a rule of taking things as they are, and not as a young woman of twenty-two fancies they ought to be."

"Oh, but I am perfectly willing to take things as they are," she returned.

"Yes, yes; but at present, you see, we happen to be at Trimingsley, and by and by, thank Heaven, we shall return to London and civilisation once more. In London you will be pretty certain to come into contact with Norgate, and in the face of all you have just been telling me one can't help speculating as to what is to follow."

"Suppose we leave it until we get home," exclaimed Evangeline, resting a hand on his sleeve;

and for a few minutes Mr. Maitland continued to smoke in silence.

"I shall miss Fairbank," he remarked presently. "I confess I like the man. I had made up my mind to see more of him."

Evangeline hesitated for a moment.

"You probably will see—see more of him," she answered; and Mr. Maitland turned to look into her face.

"Do you think it is quite fair to keep him dangling?" he asked. "In the case of the other one it wouldn't perhaps very much matter. Norgate is a butterfly——"

"Yet he always seemed to be rather in earnest!" she returned.

"In earnest! Well, a butterfly is always in earnest—in going from flower to flower," Mr. Maitland continued. "But Fairbank is a man with work to do in the world. It would," he added, more gravely than his wont, "be an immense pity to spoil it."

"I spoke to Dr. Fairbank quite frankly," said Evangeline.

"Good Heavens! do you mean that you spoke to him about Norgate?"

"Ye—es."

Mr. Maitland smiled as he stared down at his cigar.

"You think that was rather—rather unusual," she suggested.

"Just a little, perhaps."

"Still," said Evangeline, "I felt that I could treat him candidly, and I—I believe he understands."

Indeed Owen had been made to understand the state of affairs far too completely for his own peace of mind; more completely, it may be, than Evangeline could comprehend it herself. He saw that he had come upon the scene a day after the fair. It was useless to attempt to blink the distasteful fact that Evangeline had loved Norgate as Owen would have wished her to love himself; whilst the nature of Wilmot's regard seemed to be very clearly shown by his behaviour at the time of her illness.

Owen Fairbank told himself that her indignation against Norgate varied in inverse proportion to her beauty; growing weaker as her loveliness increased. Mr. Maitland had insisted that she could scarcely fail to meet the man on her return to Portman Square; and then, but not until then, it might become possible to forecast the future.

In the meantime, Owen reminded himself on the day of his critical interview with Evangeline, that above all things he must ensure his own footing at Mr. Maitland's London house, and

contrary to her expectation, he determined not to shorten his stay at Trimingsley.

To Evangeline's surprise, almost to her amusement, he made no alteration in his habits, no difference in his demeanour, but presented himself on the morning after their epoch-marking conversation as if nothing unusual had occurred; betraying no signs of embarrassment, and offering the customary suggestions for the day's amusement.

Mr. Maitland, however, refrained from inviting him to dinner, and consequently Owen had to spend his evenings in solitude at the Anchor Inn, until the few remaining days passed, and the time came to return to London. Then he bade Evangeline good-bye, in his usual, unemotional manner, with the casual suggestion that he hoped to see her again shortly after her own homecoming a few weeks hence.

One Thursday afternoon, Owen Fairbank was driven away from Trimingsley in the jolting South Morden omnibus, and, after a hot journey, reached Saint Martha's Hospital the same evening. At the hospital he had lived since his appointment to a post on the medical staff two years ago. Three months had elapsed since the beginning of the illness which had been contracted in the course of his duties, and now it was pleasant to find him-

self again amidst the familiar surroundings. Everybody had a word of welcome; from the porter at the gate to the Matron who met him before he had time to enter his room. This looked precisely the same as when he left it, save that some freshly-cut flowers had been placed in a bowl on the table. During the first hour Owen held a kind of levée. The House Surgeon, the House Physician, the Secretary, and one or two others came to greet him, and after their departure, Owen stood with his back to the fireplace and glanced around with great contentment: at the box which contained his microscope (one of his most cherished possessions), at the bookcase that hid one wall and was not filled entirely with technical works, at the few engravings which he had collected with considerable judgment.

It was good to be back again—able to resume the work he loved; but still he could not prevent his thoughts from wandering as far as Trimingsley, and he speculated concerning Evangeline's doings, hoping that she had missed him during the day—the first on which they had not met for several weeks.

In a short time he settled down to the routine of his duties at the hospital, and these kept him far too busy to indulge in many languishing day-dreams. If love were Owen's chief, it could never

become his sole consideration ; women had not bulked largely in his experiences as in Wilmot Norgate's ; and although Owen might be equally bent on gaining his object, the pursuit did not occupy his mind to the exclusion of everything else from morning until night.

Nevertheless, at the end of each day, Owen reminded himself that he had drawn nearer to his next meeting with Evangeline, and he felt impatient to meet her, apart from the satisfaction of seeing her again. Until she returned to her ordinary surroundings, it seemed to be impossible to ascertain where he stood, so that he felt a somewhat incongruous longing that she should be brought once more into contact with Wilmot Norgate, in order that her feelings might be tested and the means afforded to judge concerning his own prospects.

In the meantime, both Evangeline and her father found the days at Trimingsley somewhat wearisome without Owen. She missed the companionship which had come to be regarded as a matter of course—missed it more than she could have believed possible. After a formal discussion, it was agreed by common consent to shorten the prearranged term at Trimingsley by a week. There was no longer the remotest reason why Evangeline should hesitate to show her face

in London or elsewhere, whilst events in the Transvaal were beginning to possess such an absorbing interest for Mr. Maitland, that he longed to get within reach of his club and the latest news.

Returning to Portman Square, on the last day of September, Evangeline found it delightful to be at home again without the necessity to hide her face in her own room, although for a time she met very few of her friends. Mr. Maitland could talk about nothing but South African affairs, about President Kruger's ultimatum, and the subsequent beginning of the war. He explained the state of things with remarkable patience to Evangeline, and, like a great many other men, he predicted a cheap and an easy victory.

One of Evangeline's earliest visitors was Mrs. Oppenshaw, who came to Portman Square on a fishing expedition during the second week of October; for, although she had heard of Evangeline's return, she had been unable to obtain authoritative information concerning her appearance. On beholding the girl's face again, Mrs. Oppenshaw came to a sudden standstill just within the drawing-room door.

"How charming you are looking!" she exclaimed with enthusiastic admiration. "I have

never seen you lovelier—nor anyone else for that matter. Really Trimingsley must be the most wonderful place. I have only to say you have been there to make its reputation.”

“Please don’t,” answered Evangeline. “I think it would be an immense pity.”

Sitting down, Mrs. Oppenshaw continued somewhat embarrassingly to survey her hostess through the long-handled spectacles, talking meanwhile about anything rather than the subject uppermost in the minds of both.

“You have not inquired after Wilmot,” she exclaimed ten minutes after her arrival.

“Is—is he quite well?” asked Evangeline, with all the coolness she could assume.

“Ah, poor fellow!” said Mrs. Oppenshaw, “he was in a terrible state of mind after you dismissed him, and when he sees you again he will be half mad with remorse. He has been to Norway, but now there is an attraction powerful enough to draw him from the pole itself. My dear,” Mrs. Oppenshaw added, “I hope you are not going to use your strength like a giant.”

Evangeline carelessly shrugged her shoulders.

“I am going to do nothing whatever,” she answered.

“At all events that seems to imply no intention to avoid him,” cried Mrs. Oppenshaw, as

she closed her spectacles and rose from her chair.

"I suppose I should have to become a kind of hermit," was the answer. "It would be almost impossible to avoid Mr. Norgate unless I made up my mind to refuse every invitation."

Convinced of Mrs. Oppenshaw's determination to bring her into contact with Wilmot, as soon as circumstances permitted, Evangeline looked for an early invitation to Green Street. Towards the end of dinner a few days afterwards, Mr. Maitland remarked that he had walked along South Audley Street that afternoon, and although Evangeline had strictly avoided the neighbourhood of the house in which she was to have lived after her marriage, she listened with the closest attention.

"There was a woman who looked like a caretaker standing at the door," Mr. Maitland continued, "and yet there was no house agent's board up. It doesn't seem as if Norgate had been trying to let the place; even the curtains are still in the windows."

Evangeline could not help sighing as she remembered the pains she had bestowed on the selection of those window-curtains.

"I suppose," she answered, "Wilmot did not take the trouble to go to an agent before he left London."

"Ah, well," said Mr. Maitland, "I suspect a more deliberate purpose."

Without making any reply, Evangeline rose and walked to the door, while her father made his way to the smoking-room as usual. The afternoon having been cold, she had ordered a fire in the drawing - room, and, sitting down before it, Evangeline began to wonder whether the condition of the charming little house in South Audley Street really was indicative of Wilmot Norgate's expectations; whether he imagined that he had only to express the wish in order to bring about a renewal of the former state of affairs.

After sitting there for a long time, Evangeline's thoughts deserted Wilmot and turned to Owen, as if she had seen his face in the fire. She felt a little disappointed, perhaps, that he had not already paid his promised visit, forgetting that he must be necessarily unaware of her earlier departure from Trimingsley. Presently she took up a book, but for some reason found it impossible to fix her thoughts on its contents this evening. Glancing at her watch, she began to feel surprised that her father had not come upstairs, and growing weary of her own company, rose from her chair, and made her way to the smoking-room, where on opening the door she was almost startled to see Owen

Fairbank seated opposite to Mr. Maitland in a cloud of smoke.

To judge from Mr. Maitland's excited appearance, she had evidently interrupted the two men in the middle of a heated argument.

CHAPTER XIII

WILMOT REAPPEARS

I FANCY," exclaimed Evangeline, "that I am just in time to save Dr. Fairbank from assault and battery. What is it all about, father?" she asked, as Owen rose and took her proffered hand, while Mr. Maitland refilled his pipe, which he had allowed to go out in the heat of discussion.

"My dear Fairbank," he said in an apologetic tone, "if I was a little warm——"

"You certainly looked like a furnace," cried Evangeline, with a laugh.

"But upon my word, to suggest that those fellows can stand against our men for any length of time seems utterly preposterous," continued Mr. Maitland; while Owen discreetly refused to be drawn again. He had almost begun to fear that he might be compelled to leave the house without seeing Evangeline, for sincerely as he esteemed her father he had not come to Portman Square expressly for the pleasure of Mr. Maitland's company this evening.

"Have you had time to forget all about Trimingsley yet?" asked Owen.

"Oh, well," answered Evangeline warily, "there have been a great many other interesting things to think about lately."

"I had no idea until this evening that you had cut short your stay," said Owen.

"The fact is," Mr. Maitland candidly explained, "we began to find the place just a little slow after you left it. Besides, I wished to get into touch with the world once more."

The conversation became general, and after many reminiscences of Trimingsley, of their bicycle rides and the Ramsbottoms, Owen suggested that Mr. Maitland should bring Evangeline to look over the hospital, dwelling with such enthusiasm on its accommodation and its requirements, that she had scarcely the heart to refuse while yet she feared to accept the invitation.

Since that important talk at Trimingsley, Evangeline had solemnly warned herself of the necessity of absolute discretion, but in the present case Mr. Maitland took the responsibility out of her hands, accepting Owen's invitation, with the result that, a day or two later, Evangeline set forth to inspect Saint Martha's Hospital.

There Owen led her through the various wards, into the new laboratory, the operating theatre, and

finally to his own room, where Evangeline took off her gloves to pour out the tea. Here they were joined by the Secretary and the House Surgeon, the three men conducting themselves as if they were very young boys, and causing both Evangeline and Mr. Maitland to spend an enjoyable if a surprisingly frivolous half-hour.

On the way to the door, Owen, seizing the opportunity to fall behind with Evangeline, warned her of his intention to return her visit before many days had passed; and so the acquaintance begun at Trimingsley was renewed in London. She soon perceived, indeed, that nothing short of a direct rebuff was in the least likely to put an end to it; there seemed to be something peculiarly tenacious about Owen, who came to Portman Square a second and a third time before Wilmot Norgate re-entered Evangeline's sphere.

Choosing the afternoon on the third occasion, Owen had the satisfaction of seeing her alone; his first experience of the kind in London. It was just after the disaster at Nicholson's Nek, and Mr. Maitland had become far too restless and excited to spend many consecutive waking hours at home.

"I suppose," remarked Owen, when he had been in the drawing-room half an hour, "that the most of your friends are still away from London?"

"A great many of them, of course," answered

Evangeline, unable to resist a smile at his somewhat transparent diplomacy.

"You will rejoice when your world becomes a little more densely populated!"

"Why, yes, perhaps I shall, now that I am able to hold up my head again," she admitted. "I had seen very few people for some time before I went away, you know."

"What a blessed thing that you selected Trimingsley!" said Owen, with a laugh.

"Surely it was a matter of the greatest unimportance," she retorted.

"If you throw a stone into a pool," Owen insisted, "every ripple must have some kind of effect throughout the world."

"Let me see!" cried Evangeline gaily, "I suppose Trimingsley is the pool, and that I am the stone——"

"Then I must pose as the world," said Owen.

"You appear to be ambitious!"

"Well, it is true I begin to feel a germinating ambition," he admitted; and Evangeline glanced brightly into his face.

"The result of the ripples," she suggested.

"Yes," he answered soberly, "undoubtedly the result of ripples."

A few days later Evangeline found the expected invitation from Mrs. Oppenshaw on the breakfast-

table, and passed the letter to her father, who was not to be included in the party.

"Of course," said Mr. Maitland, "you understand what lies in waiting!"

"What?" she asked.

"You will be pretty certain to meet Norgate."

"If I go," said Evangeline.

"Have you any doubt about going?" inquired Mr. Maitland.

"Oh, I don't know!" exclaimed Evangeline, with a sigh. "Sometimes one seems to hesitate, and yet there's a kind of sub-consciousness that one's decision is inevitable all the time."

"I confess," answered Mr. Maitland, "there seems to be a certain inevitability about your relationship to Norgate."

"Pray—pray don't think of it in that way," she entreated.

"Still, you may as well admit that you intend to go to Green Street."

"You see," said Evangeline persuasively, "if I refuse I shall be only putting off——"

"The evil day."

"Putting off the meeting," she continued hastily. "I shall be obliged to go to other houses, and if— if Wilmot really wishes to see me, nothing can be much easier."

It was affectation to suggest that he might not

wish to see her, especially when she remembered that he had allowed the house in South Audley Street to remain just as it had been prepared some months ago for her reception. Evangeline even went as far as to admit (to herself) that she felt pleased at the prospect of meeting Wilmot again ; she not only desired to meet him, but to appear at her very best as if to overwhelm him by the recollection of that time when he had let her understand that she was repulsive.

She seemed to owe nothing less to herself than this reassertion of her power, and, although the dinner was to be a small one, Evangeline ordered a new dress, the complete effect of which Mr. Maitland inspected as usual a few minutes before her departure. Yet now the time had come, and she was on the point of entering the carriage, Evangeline almost began to wish that she had refused Mrs. Oppenshaw's invitation.

It was impossible, in the face of all that had passed, to meet Wilmot Norgate as if he were an ordinary acquaintance. Fortunately, she was not required to meet him alone ! As far as she could understand her own emotions (after many strenuous endeavours), Evangeline felt no impatience to see him for his own sake ; her elaborate preparations having been designed for his chastisement rather than for his gratification.

On her arrival at Green Street, the party, including the hostess, consisted of seven persons, but at the latest moment the eighth entered: tall, broadly-built, well-turned-out, slightly more bronzed than usual, and conspicuously handsome.

As Wilmot crossed the room to greet Mrs. Oppenshaw, his eyes roved until they rested on Evangeline, who saw his quick flush, while for an instant he came almost to a standstill.

On parting from her in June, Wilmot had insisted that he positively refused to accept his dismissal as final. He believed that, in the event of her complete recovery, she could not fail to take a more lenient view of his conduct; whereas if, on the contrary, Evangeline's disfigurement should remain permanent, her opinion would in that unfortunate contingency scarcely count.

Although no news had reached him since she left London for Trimingsley, she constantly occupied his thoughts; he regarded himself as still held in reserve for Evangeline, and ultimately turned his face homewards with an extreme impatience to ascertain how she had fared during his absence. Wilmot Norgate had the great advantage of knowing precisely his own mind. He wanted Evangeline as she had been when first he saw her face in Mrs. Oppenshaw's drawing-room, and during the long interval of suspense he had

bestowed no thought on any other woman ; priding himself, indeed, on his faithfulness. On reaching London he lost no time in making his way to Green Street, where Mrs. Oppenshaw, fresh from her visit to Portman Square, greeted him in the highest spirits, with the most enticing description of Evangeline. The consequence was that Wilmot implored his old friend to spare no effort to arrange a meeting, and hence the small dinner-party at short notice this evening.

Wilmot's expectations, high as these had been, were faint in comparison with the reality, and he came near to losing his self-possession before the guests, who, being cognisant of his experiences, found an unusually romantic interest in the rencontre. Mrs. Oppenshaw, however, came to the rescue, whispered the name of his partner, and dinner being at once announced Wilmot went downstairs without the opportunity of a word with Evangeline.

He bowed gravely as she took her seat almost opposite to him at the table, and while everyone else had something to say about the war, Wilmot talked as little as he ate. Although Evangeline began to dread the moment when Mrs. Oppenshaw should rise from the head of the table and lead the way to the drawing-room, she experienced a distinctly pleasurable feeling at her obvious success ;

understanding precisely what Wilmot's silence signified, and wishing indeed that, as far as she was concerned, it might not be broken this evening.

In the drawing-room after dinner Evangeline took care to keep as close as possible to Mrs. Oppenshaw, until after what seemed a painfully brief interval the men entered; and then she did her utmost not to afford Wilmot an opportunity to find her unoccupied. He, for his part, hung rather gloomily about the other side of the room, and it was only a few minutes before she rose to go away that he could succeed in speaking to her apart from the rest.

"I can't get rid of a sort of feeling that I ought to ask for an introduction," he began, taking the seat which had just become empty by her side.

"That is not very difficult to understand," she returned, in her most dignified manner.

"It seems an eternity since I saw you last," he continued. "And from that day to the present I have been waiting—longing for this moment."

"Well," exclaimed Evangeline, "it is the moment for saying good-bye."

With that she turned a little markedly to speak to the man at her other side, and Wilmot found no farther opportunity before she rose to bid Mrs. Oppenshaw good-night. But he stayed behind after all the other guests had departed; when his

hostess, leaning back in her chair, as fresh and wide-awake as if she had just got up, looked into his somewhat gloomy face with a smile.

"Well," she exclaimed, "I hope you don't think that my report was too favourable!"

"Upon my soul," he answered, pacing the room, "it's difficult to believe in the reality of things."

"Isn't Evangeline Maitland real enough?" she demanded.

"It's scarcely possible to grasp the fact that she is the same girl from whom I parted only a few months ago!" said Wilmot.

"Ah," cried Mrs. Oppenshaw, "that parting was the greatest mistake you ever made in your life."

"Even the first time I saw her she was not so beautiful," he muttered.

"After all," was the answer, "at my time of life I can't regard a woman's face as the most important thing in the world."

"From Troy downwards it hasn't been far from it," insisted Wilmot.

Mrs. Oppenshaw began to laugh in a satisfied manner, as she observed his complete return to allegiance; but presently she looked more serious again.

"What is your plan of campaign?" she demanded.

"I shall go to Portman Square to-morrow."

"So soon?"

"I shall not have a moment's peace until I have restored the *status quo ante bellum*."

"You think that Evangeline will consent to receive you?" asked Mrs. Oppenshaw.

"Yes, I fancy she will," he returned, with ample confidence.

"Well, I wish you success with all my heart," was the answer. "But take my advice this time! Don't be too impetuous. I can assure you Evangeline is not to be had just for the asking."

"You—you don't imagine there's anybody else?" he exclaimed, with sudden anxiety.

"I am scarcely in a position to know," she said; and bidding Mrs. Oppenshaw good-night, Wilmot left the house.

CHAPTER XIV

AN AMENDE

ON leaving Mrs. Oppenshaw, Wilmot Norgate walked to his rooms in Mount Street in an excited, tumultuous state of mind. He was more deeply enamoured of Evangeline than he had ever been before; she had succeeded in fascinating him again, as she had done the first time he saw her, and he assured himself a great many times that life could never be in the least worth living without her.

In a prolonged retrospect before he went to bed that night, he found it extremely difficult to realise that Evangeline had ever looked other than consummately beautiful, that there had ever been a time when he was misguided enough to regard her with anything less than the most fervent admiration. He laughed scornfully at the recollection that she had had cause to accuse him of shrinking from her, and it appeared ridiculous to imagine that she had severed the engagement, on account, forsooth! of his coldness. His mood was

certainly not in the least degree cold to-night, as he looked back to some of their most delightful interviews in the drawing-room at Portman Square ; and while he continued to heap reproach after reproach upon himself, and felt prepared for any abasement, he could not look into the future and contemplate failure. Wilmot longed eagerly for to-morrow, when he determined to present himself at the house again ; it being necessary to make a considerable effort to convince himself that he had no longer any shadow of a claim upon her.

After a sleepless night, he rose unusually early the next morning, and as soon as he had finished breakfast, did what he had often done during the days of their betrothal, made his way to a neighbouring florist's, selected a basket of choice flowers, waiting while they were arranged for transmission to Portman Square with his card.

If Evangeline felt a little surprised to receive the flowers, Mr. Maitland's astonishment seemed to be freely mingled with indignation.

"Am I to take as much for granted as Norgate evidently does ?" he suggested.

"Of course," exclaimed Evangeline, shrugging her shoulders, "you mustn't hold me responsible for any action of Wilmot's."

"Do you intend to send the things back to Mount Street ?" demanded Mr. Maitland.

She stood gazing at the basket of flowers with mingled sensations, being quite human enough to triumph in the renewal of her authority, while yet she felt somewhat afraid, perhaps, of a half-suspected weakness which might lurk behind it.

"Oh, I—I don't think I ought to return them," she answered.

"You must understand that these are harbingers of Norgate himself!"

Evangeline looked up into Mr. Maitland's face with an expression of alarm.

"He cannot possibly intend to come to-day," she answered; but still she took no precaution to avoid seeing Wilmot in the event of the fulfilment of Mr. Maitland's prophecy. While she abstained from giving the butler orders to say she was "not at home" if Wilmot came to the door, however, she would not take the flowers out of the basket, but having lingered over them for some time (after Mr. Maitland's departure) Evangeline replaced the visiting card on the top and left them standing on one of the drawing-room chairs.

As the morning wore on, she tried to make up her mind as to whether she wished him to come to the house or to stay away. It could not be denied that she still gloried in his surrender! After a period of rebellion, her writ

ran again in that country, although Evangeline felt by no means inclined to act as if loyalty had always prevailed. But remembering how she had writhed under his ill-treatment, it became impossible not to enjoy the opportunity of witnessing his penitence, while yet it seemed as if, in some unaccountable way, the sinner had lost some of his former attractiveness.

By the afternoon, Evangeline came to the conclusion that there might be sufficient probability, in Mr. Maitland's opinion, to prevent her from going out, so that when Wilmot Norgate arrived at a little before four o'clock he found her in the drawing-room.

It was pleasant to be there again amidst the familiar surroundings. He saw that her face was slightly flushed, and her manner excited, as if proving that she could not regard his visit with anything approaching indifference. He told himself that while she might (not entirely without cause) cherish a certain amount of indignation against him, she could never put him on a level with the generality of men. And, indeed, as she rose from her chair, taking his proffered hand, Evangeline's wayward memory turned to his earlier visits, the manner of his greetings on such occasions causing her cheeks to grow more rosy than ever and filling her with embarrassment.

"The flowers were lovely!" she cried, as he looked into her eyes.

"You have not even condescended to open the basket," he answered, glancing towards it and noticing his visiting card on the top.

"Oh well, one takes things for granted," she said carelessly.

"I wish to goodness," Wilmot exclaimed, "I could induce you to take the last few miserable months in that way."

"In which way?"

"I should like you to blot them out entirely," he urged, with a great deal of fervour, "and go back to that better day when I bade you good-bye before I left for Devonshire."

Turning aside, Evangeline took a few steps across the room, stopping beside the chair which supported the flowers, and picking up his card.

"Of course, it was immensely kind of you to send them," she murmured, staring at the paste-board, "but I prefer that you should not do it again."

"Can't you understand that old habits proved too strong for me?" he suggested.

She glanced up a little provokingly into his face.

"Which of the old habits?" she demanded; and as Wilmot stepped closer, she drew quickly

away; and this instinctively, without any process of reflection.

"Evangeline!" he muttered, with a shadow of reproach in his voice.

"Don't you think," she cried, "that [there might be an advantage in a little more formality?"

"Formality—between you and me—with the memories this room awakens!"

"Just because of those," she retorted.

"Even the wretched day we parted here," Wilmot persisted, "you could not pretend that you had ceased to care for me."

"Ah, but that was months and months ago," she answered, laughing in her desire to avoid anything of the nature of emotion.

"The interval has passed slowly enough for me in all conscience!" said Wilmot.

"Has it?" she asked, lifting her eyebrows.

"For Heaven's sake let us try to forget!" he exclaimed.

"Don't you find," Evangeline suggested, "that the very things you the most wish to forget cling the closest to your memory?"

"Then," he cried eagerly, "then you—you would at least forget them if you could!"

She raised her shoulders, with a gesture which was intended to convince him that the matter was of the completest unimportance.

"I am not at all certain," she returned. "It is always well to take everything into account, you know."

"Has it been a particularly cheerful time for you?" he demanded.

There was very little need to search her mind for an answer, and in truth Evangeline could not say that, after the first wretched week or two had passed, she had felt by any means invariably and positively unhappy. On the contrary, some of those days at Trimingsley stood out rather pleasantly—days when she was learning to know Owen Fairbank. A comparison and a contrast seemed to become (not for the first time) inevitable, and again the difference between the two men seemed to be marked by their respective surroundings. Although Wilmot Norgate was devoted to sport, far more so indeed than Owen, he was associated in Evangeline's mind rather with brilliantly lighted ballrooms, whilst Owen carried with him something of the inspiring quality of the breeze on the cliff where she had the most frequently met him.

"I don't think it has been altogether a bad time," she said.

"Then I have the less cause for self-reproach," answered Wilmot, beginning to realise that he

was unfortunately not destined at once to have everything his own way.

"Why, you have none!" she insisted.

"Still," he urged, more eagerly than ever, "it is impossible you can have forgotten——"

"I have an excellent memory," she returned. "I shall never forget, so there is not the slightest need to remind me of anything."

Wilmot turned away despondently, but after staring out at one of the windows for a few seconds, he faced Evangeline again.

"For Heaven's sake, have a little sympathy," he pleaded. "Try to imagine all that your—your transformation must have meant to me."

"Did you ever for a moment try to imagine what it meant to me?" she demanded.

"My own loss seemed so immense, so completely overwhelming, I suppose I thought only of that," he confessed. "And," he added, "whatever I may have done or left undone, you can't help knowing that I love you. Evangeline! I want you to let me pick up the threads where we dropped them that day I left London"; and before she could divine his purpose, Wilmot seized her hands, attempting to draw her towards him.

"The threads can never be picked up again," she cried; and as he resisted an effort to release herself, "Please don't!" she said sharply.

"Evangeline!" he whispered, tightening his grasp.

"This is odious to me!" she exclaimed; and cut to the quick, Wilmot at once set her free. It was always difficult for him to put himself in another person's place, to judge from a standpoint different from his own; and even now, in spite of the strongest evidence, he could scarcely realise that she, in her turn, actually shrank from his embrace.

"Then I have to set to work to win you over again," he answered.

"Once bitten—twice shy," said Evangeline, taking care to stand with half the space of the room between them. "I should like you to realise," she continued, "that although I have permitted reminiscences to-day, there must be nothing more of the kind if we should ever happen to meet again."

"Oh, you may feel perfectly satisfied," he answered, "that I understand I have been put on the footing of Tom, Dick, and Harry."

Wilmot had scarcely ceased speaking, when to his extreme annoyance the door opened, and looking over the butler's shoulder he saw a tall, fair-haired man enter the room.

"Dr. Fairbank!"

For the moment Wilmot assumed that Owen was Weston's *locum tenens*, and that he had come to

pay a professional visit, while Evangeline's formal introduction did not tend to dispel the misunderstanding. Wilmot could not help observing, however, that she appeared somewhat pleased to see the second visitor, and indeed she felt sincerely thankful for any interruption to constrain the first. Owen, as usual, seemed to be perfectly at home, and sitting down began to talk to Evangeline without giving the slightest attention to Wilmot.

"Dr. Fairbank was at Trimingsley while we were there," she remarked presently; and the information brought Norgate considerable enlightenment.

"You must have found it rather slow if you stayed many weeks," he suggested.

"Oh well, I was there a good while," answered Owen, "but I can't say the place seemed exactly dull," and he glanced at Evangeline for corroboration.

"Not in the least," she murmured; and rising from his chair Wilmot said good-bye.

After she had shaken his hand, and rung the bell for the butler to show him out, Owen stood leaning in his negligent way against the pianoforte; his frock-coat unbuttoned, his fingers thrust in his waistcoat pockets—one of his few mannerisms. Evangeline could not help contrasting his cool, alert manner with the somewhat inconvenient intensity which Wilmot had recently been display-

ing, wondering whether either afforded a very trustworthy clue to character ; or at least, if she granted that Wilmot's was the more passionate nature, it became difficult to believe that Owen Fairbank would prove less persistent and tenacious if he once deliberately set himself to secure any definite object. A smile passed over his face as he stood looking down into hers.

"Ought I to congratulate you?" he asked.

"Don't you think that is a rather out-of-the-way question?" she retorted.

"We have always seemed to agree as to the general advantages of frankness," he insisted.

"It becomes a little difficult in the particular," said Evangeline, "and a line is bound to be drawn somewhere, you know."

"Still," he urged, "you mustn't forget my personal interest in the course of events."

"I—I am sorry," she answered quietly.

"Well, if that is really the case," cried Owen, "I suppose I have cause to feel sorry also. But anyhow, that need not prevent you from telling me where I stand."

"I think," said Evangeline, looking into his eyes, with a rather forced laugh, "you have a way of saying the very strangest things."

"Oh, well," he returned, "I assure you I am capable of saying things in a perfectly ordinary

way at the proper time. I have no intention of bothering you, only I hope you will deal with me candidly, as—as you did to a certain extent at Trimingsley."

Evangeline sighed, and then she smiled again, as she leaned back in her chair. Owen looked entirely calm and unflurried, as if he were observing her with some calculated purpose.

"You should endeavour to grasp the fact that everything is different in London," she said. "At Trimingsley, for instance, you used not to wear a frock-coat and a tall hat. Besides, we were not in the habit of talking about ourselves—at least——"

"Don't you see that we seldom talked about anything or anybody else," answered Owen. "Or, at anyrate, other subjects were interesting only because of the sidelight they threw on you."

"Oh dear!" she cried, "what a dreadful egotist you make me appear! But anyhow, you can scarcely expect the process to continue."

"I am one of the most patient men under the sun," said Owen. "If I set my mind on a thing, I can wait—and wait—and wait. But, if it happens that someone else has already succeeded in gaining possession of it — why, persistence would degenerate into foolishness."

"Isn't it possible," suggested Evangeline, "that

a thing may be true for a particular person and yet not positively the fact?"

"That sounds a little involved," answered Owen; "and," he added with a smile, "as far as one can understand, it certainly smacks of casuistry."

"You are so audacious," cried Evangeline, "that it becomes difficult to know how to talk to you."

"Ah yes, but isn't my audacity to be excused by what took place at Trimingsley the day after the news of your engagement was sprung upon me? Mr. Maitland, at least, appeared to think it might possibly be renewed when you returned to London, and—well, now you are here!"

"And," said Evangeline, "if I were to condescend to tell you that my father was entirely unjustified, you would be certain to assume—oh, all manner of unwarrantable things."

"Now, I begin to understand," exclaimed Owen. "You are afraid to confess that you have finished with Norgate lest I should jump to the conclusion that there is a prospect of your putting someone else in his place. But I will promise to make no deductions of that kind, although you must remember the open road is free to all wayfarers. I only ask you to tell me whether it is open or not."

"I absolutely decline to take the responsibility of saying whither it may lead," said Evangeline.

And from this answer, Owen tried to draw such poor consolation as might be possible.

But at least Norgate had not carried everything before him with a rush, and this, as far as it went, was good, though Owen could not help wishing that Evangeline had refused to receive Wilmot in Portman Square, since, with the existing record, total abstinence promised to afford more complete safety than moderate indulgence. To continue on friendly terms with the man to whom she had once been affianced, appeared to Owen Fairbank a difficult and a highly dangerous experiment.

CHAPTER XV

THE SECOND PARTING

WILMOT NORGATE walked away from Mr. Maitland's house in Portman Square that afternoon in an extremely melancholy state of mind, and perhaps he had never felt more downcast in his life. Apart from the fact that Evangeline's demeanour had convinced him that he had actually lost ground during his absence, the appearance of Owen Fairbank on the scene seemed to alter entirely the position of affairs.

It was peculiarly vexatious to be driven to the conclusion that while he had remained steadfast, and had found his chief solace in looking forward to her recovery, Evangeline had been passing her time enjoyably in the company of another man.

Concerning this man, Wilmot now made it his immediate business to make inquiries, and from his own interested point of view, the result proved eminently unsatisfactory. He learned that Owen's career had been undoubtedly distinguished, that he was likely to gain renown in the world of science,

and that (perhaps the worst of all) he possessed sufficient private means to please himself concerning marriage.

There is a kind of obstinacy which is scarcely akin to perseverance, and in the face of opposition, Wilmot Norgate, without the slightest lessening of his desire, became inclined to sulk like an ill-humoured schoolboy. Moreover, he had a tendency to lose his temper with Evangeline, very much as he had lost it at the period of her transformation. If she had the bad taste to prefer Fairbank, let her by all means take the man, and welcome ! Wilmot's anger rivalled his chagrin, and she should find that he was not the man to be played fast and loose with ! He felt at variance with Evangeline, with himself and with circumstances. His ordinary avocations had ceased to possess the remotest interest, and although he ought to have been grouse shooting in Scotland, he found it impossible to tear himself away from the neighbourhood of Portman Square.

As the time passed, the news from the theatre of war grew worse and worse ; a great many of Wilmot's friends had gone already to the front, whither his own inclination naturally led. He clung to the notion that his departure would prove a kind of punishment for Evangeline, since she could easily have prevented it if she chose. She

would perhaps feel sorry when it was too late! Although he succeeded in obtaining invitations to more than one house where he might reasonably expect to meet her, he had not seen her face since he saw that of Owen Fairbank, until one afternoon Wilmot set forth to the house in South Audley Street.

Mr. Maitland had, of course, been quite accurate in his interpretation of Wilmot's motive in leaving the whole of the furniture intact. He had put a woman in charge of the place before he started to Norway, and now it remained just as he had arranged it for Evangeline's reception.

Wilmot found a melancholy and tantalising satisfaction in visiting the house, where he had often stood in her company, and as he strolled slowly and aimlessly through the rooms to-day, with their carpets and curtains such as she had taken pains to select, it certainly seemed a harsh fate which ordained that he should be deprived of the recompense of bringing Evangeline home to it.

He had no definite purpose in going to South Audley Street to-day; he seemed, indeed, to have no definite purpose in his life at the moment, but after inspecting the rooms, he lighted a cigarette, and threw himself wearily into an arm-chair, with dreams of what might and ought to have been. It

was a little past four o'clock when he rose and walked to the front door, where he stood for a few minutes talking to the caretaker ; then setting forth in the direction of Oxford Street, he reached the corner of Orchard Street and saw Evangeline only a few yards in advance. After a momentary hesitation, Wilmot hastened his steps, and lifting his hat as he came to her side, began at once to discuss the subject which filled the minds of most persons at the time.

"It struck me that you seemed to know Dr. Fairbank rather intimately," he suggested presently, and Evangeline's answer was annoyingly prompt.

"Oh, very well indeed !"

"I suppose you used to see a good deal of him at that forsaken place !" said Wilmot.

"We always met two or three times a day," cried Evangeline cheerfully. "You may have heard me speak of Muriel Gardiner ?" she added.

"Of course," said Wilmot.

"Dr. Fairbank is her cousin ; before her marriage she used to be Muriel Fairbank, you know. I am afraid you are coming out of your way," exclaimed Evangeline, as they drew near to the Square.

"You have made every other but your own utterly objectionable," he protested. "I daresay you can guess where I have come from !"

"Your—your club?" she suggested.

"I have just left South Audley Street," Wilmot answered, with reproach in his voice.

Evangeline's colour heightened as she realised that but for her painful transformation they would by this time have been occupying the house together. She remembered also their constant visits of inspection, the selection of the furniture, and her unequivocal pleasure over everything connected with her future home. For a moment the reminiscence seemed to lessen the distance betwixt herself and Wilmot, whilst, somewhat oddly, she experienced a wish to see the effect of the drawing-room curtains now that they were hung. There had been some question concerning their harmonising with the general colour-scheme of the room.

"I couldn't bring myself to dismantle the place," said Wilmot. "You would find that everything is standing exactly as you ordered. The house seems to cry out for its mistress."

Wilmot fancied that he could detect signs of relenting in her face, and it is true that for a very few seconds Evangeline felt not a little sympathetic, but then she made an effort to harden her heart.

"It seems almost a pity not to let the house," she answered, without a tremor in her voice; but when he came to a standstill, and said good-bye, in an

obvious ill-humour, she experienced a shade of compunction, accusing herself of something like brutality.

In her own room that night she tried to imagine Wilmot's forlorn visit to the house, and even went as far as to make an attempt to picture herself its mistress. But the glamour had faded, as it seemed, beyond recall, and she felt like one to whom a peep behind the scenes has brought disillusioning.

And on farther reflection, this appeared to be actually Evangeline's case. That Wilmot desired as ardently as ever to make her his wife, was scarcely to be doubted ; only, she could not persuade herself that the quality of his affection was such as she demanded. At one time she had never attempted an analysis, but had accepted his protestations at their superficial value, whereas now, Evangeline assured herself that she had learnt to understand their real meaning ; that they dealt with only one part of love, and not by any means with the holiest.

She was influenced also by the conviction that she and Wilmot had drifted steadily farther apart. Whilst an ordinary observer might not have noticed any remarkable change in Evangeline, she knew that one had taken place. At present it may have been significant of what might happen in the future, rather than potent in immediate results.

But she frequently told herself that her outlook on life would never be quite the same again, the temporary loss of beauty having given her pause for a time, and subsequently driven her farther afield in search of that self-esteem without which life becomes well-nigh unendurable. While she had made no pronounced alteration in her habits, the leaven was surely working, and hence the difficulty that Wilmot experienced in meeting her in her ordinary haunts during the ensuing few weeks.

For one thing, there seemed to be a general indisposition to gaiety just now, but in Evangeline's case many of her former amusements had lost their zest, and the customary routine of entertainments appeared hollow and unsatisfying. Even if she could otherwise have dreamed of falling in with Wilmot's wishes, this second and (as she told herself) greater transformation made her unfit to become the wife of such a man. She could not reasonably expect from him any deep sympathy, or, for that matter, understanding, especially as she had nothing to show for the change, which yet she knew to be radical.

In the meantime, Wilmot's dissatisfaction with things in general was steadily on the increase. He heard from good-natured friends of Owen Fairbank's frequent visits to Portman Square, and

vowed that for his own part he refused to be tied to any woman's apron-strings! At the slightest sign of encouragement Wilmot would doubtless have hastened to Evangeline's side again, but as none was forthcoming he became more and more eager to leave England for the front.

The last train had steamed out of Ladysmith, where General White was now besieged, and Wilmot—a good shot and an equally good horseman—perceived that his time had come. It was during the second week in November, one dismally foggy afternoon, that he astonished Evangeline by presenting himself in her drawing-room. For the moment she found it difficult to recover her self-possession.

“What—what terrible news from South Africa!” she exclaimed, a little nervously. “Nobody seems able to talk of anything else.”

“I suppose,” he answered, as they both sat down, “I ought to offer you an apology for coming here—though goodness knows the necessity seems strange enough. The fact is,” he added, “I am off to Cape Town.”

“So many men I know are going out,” she said; and his thoughts became bitter at the equanimity of her tone. However sincere her patriotism might be, she could scarcely hear his announce-

ment with such perfect serenity if a spark of love remained.

"You did not hear me to a finish," Wilmot continued. "There still remains an alternative. I have nothing to urge that I haven't urged before, and I haven't come here to defend myself."

"Why should you?"

"I am becoming more convinced every day," he went on, paying no heed to her interruption, "that life without you is not worth living. It isn't the least consolation to tell myself that I flung away my chance. Even when you dismissed me, I made myself believe you would welcome me again as soon as you were well——"

"Ah, but suppose I had not recovered," Evangeline could not help exclaiming.

"The fact remains that you have. You are more beautiful than ever, and my love for you—God knows!—is stronger. Evangeline," he cried, "I can scarcely believe that yours for me is quite dead."

"Yes," she murmured, yet not entirely unmoved, "I am afraid that is precisely the truth. There is no more life in it."

"Let me quicken it," he urged, leaning forward eagerly towards her; but Evangeline slowly, a little sadly, shook her head.

"There are not very many miracles nowadays," she answered.

"I wonder," exclaimed Wilmot, "whether you have any notion of what the words you can speak so calmly signify to me!"

"Remember," she returned, "that I have passed through something of the kind."

"You have never heard me say I didn't love you," he insisted.

"Words," she answered, "seemed to be scarcely necessary."

"You won't encourage me to stay then?" he asked, rising from his chair.

Evangeline looked frankly into his face.

"I think this war is horrible—horrible," she cried. "The possibility of it seems almost to shake one's faith. But if I were a man I should go, and if I had a brother I should send him."

Wilmot bade her good-bye the next moment, and taking his hat from the table walked to the door, downstairs, and out of the house. To Evangeline, as to him, there seemed to be a definite finality about the present interview, such as he at least had refused to admit before.

Even now a word might have brought him back, but while she felt no wish for his recall, she began to experience a sense of void, as if she had lost

some familiar thing out of her life. She did not want it, yet she missed it, and on Mr. Maitland's return that afternoon he perceived at once that she had endured some kind of ordeal during his absence in quest of war news at the club.

CHAPTER XVI

BAD NEWS

MR. MAITLAND made no attempt to force Evangeline's confidence, nor did she enlighten him until late the same evening, when going to the smoking-room—the scene of many confidences—she shut the door and sat down.

“Well?” he said, watching her grave face.

“Wilmot came this afternoon,” she answered.

“Such things used to be common enough,” he exclaimed with a smile.

“He isn't likely to come again,” she returned.

“He is going to South Africa.”

“I detect a note of regret,” said Mr. Maitland.

“No,” she cried, “no!” as if she had been thinking the matter out in silence. “It isn't regret that I feel.”

“Then what is it?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“When one has been hesitating—although I have not exactly hesitated either—one feels a kind of—well, of nervousness on making the actual

decision. I feel I have done something irrevocable——”

“I understood your decision was supposed to be irrevocable before.”

“So it was—as far as I was concerned. But Wilmot told me he should come again, and—and he came. But now I have succeeded in convincing him. I can’t wish I hadn’t done it, but yet——”

“Now, why did you do it?” he demanded, turning in his chair the better to see her face.

“I was compelled to do one of two things: to promise to marry him after all, or to let him go. I didn’t feel the least inclination to be married.”

“Your *amour propre* has still not quite recovered?” Mr. Maitland suggested.

“I don’t think it was that,” she returned. “But I know I am different, and—and I suppose Wilmot will always be the same. He deliberately waited to see what I looked like, and if I hadn’t been retransformed he wouldn’t have troubled me again.”

“In the face of all that,” cried her father, “why on earth do you look so melancholy?”

“Do I?” she asked, trying to force a smile. “But,” she added, “I don’t feel very merry, and I am afraid he doesn’t.”

“Oh, well,” said Mr. Maitland, “it is pure waste

of energy to feel the least anxiety about Norgate. The chap will find consolation."

"I don't think you are quite just to him," answered Evangeline, who believed that he would carry her picture whithersoever he went. It might not be a true portrait, he might not think of her as she wished to be thought of, but that, within his limitations, he cared for her she entertained no doubt whatever. But Mr. Maitland placed small confidence in the mortality of Norgate's wound, and, moreover, he had a shrewd suspicion that Wilmot's discomfiture was due far more to Owen Fairbank than his daughter realised.

If, however, the one man's loss promised to prove the other's gain, Owen did not perceive any immediate alteration in his favour. Unaware of what had occurred, he even fancied on his next visit to Portman Square that Evangeline seemed a little less cordial than usual.

It was generally in the evening that he came, when he would sit for half an hour in the smoking-room, and perhaps Mr. Maitland would then take him upstairs to Evangeline, or send for her to come down. The war formed the chief topic of conversation, and this evening Mr. Maitland was deploring his lost youth.

"One or two St. Martha's men are off," said Owen ; and Evangeline turned to face him rather hastily.

"Are you going?" she asked, making no allusion to Wilmot's approaching departure.

"It's rather hard luck," he returned. "Although I am a man of peace, there's a time for all things."

"Aren't you strong enough yet?" she inquired with ready intuition.

"I am told I should only get in the way," he said. "Rather tantalising, isn't it?"

"Ah well," cried Mr. Maitland, "you have been wounded in your own honourable campaign. You can't eat your pie and have it, you know."

"They threaten that I might collapse under any extraordinary strain," Owen explained. "If it hadn't been for that I should have volunteered for ambulance work. Still," he added drily, "at the present rate of things I may be able to come in towards the finish."

Evangeline could sympathise with his disappointment, but the talk turned her thoughts to Wilmot, who, as it happened, had gone that evening to say good-bye to Mrs. Oppenshaw.

"At the present moment," he told her, "I feel that the enemy is capable of proving my truest friend. A Mauser bullet in the brain is the best thing I hope for."

He left Green Street in a dejected frame of mind, and nothing seemed very much to matter.

Having at last come to the unwilling conclusion that Evangeline could never be nearer to him than she was to-day, he made arrangements for the sale of his furniture and the disposal of the house, leaving ample instructions to this effect with his solicitor. His intention was to sail for Cape Town on his own responsibility, and there to join some troop of irregular horse. He equipped himself as for a long campaign, gave notice to relinquish his rooms in Mount Street, and made his will.

It was from Mrs. Oppenshaw that Evangeline heard of his actual departure, with many dismal prognostications as to his fate.

"Oh, but I hope he will return quite safely," said Evangeline. "Of course there must be a risk, but what should we think of the man who shirked it?"

"I can't put aside the fear that I shall never see him again," answered Mrs. Oppenshaw. "And," she added, "you know I am always plain-spoken. I can't forget who sent him away."

"Then you don't credit him with love of his country!" cried Evangeline.

"That is all very well," said Mrs. Oppenshaw; "but his country didn't come first. You could have kept him by raising a finger, and I can't afford to lose such friends as I possess. I am not exactly blaming you——"

"I almost thought you were."

"No, I don't exactly blame you," was the answer. "Of course you were at liberty to act as you pleased, but I am very fond of Wilmot, notwithstanding his faults, and I wish with all my heart you could have made him happy."

In spite of herself, Evangeline began to feel a little uncomfortable after Mrs. Oppenshaw had gone away, and she perceived that, by one person at the least, she should always be held responsible for any untoward fate that might befall Wilmot. Although Evangeline usually left Owen to initiate any conversation about Norgate, she spontaneously mentioned his name a day or two after the interview with Mrs. Oppenshaw.

"I don't know," she remarked, "whether you have heard that Wilmot is on his way to the front!"

"It isn't the first time I have envied him," exclaimed Owen, but her manner did not encourage him to inquire whether anything decisive had occurred previous to Wilmot's departure. Nor could Owen derive the slightest consolation from the fact. He fancied even that absence might work in Norgate's favour, and the next time he came to Portman Square he was compelled to go away without seeing Evangeline. Towards Christmas, a common desire to brighten the season

for the numerous Ramsbottoms and for the in-patients at the hospital, seemed to bring them more closely together again, however, and one afternoon in early January, Owen ventured to ask whether she had received any news of Wilmot since his arrival in South Africa.

"He dislikes letter-writing," Evangeline answered, "and Mrs. Oppenshaw has not heard a word. I often wonder whether he has seen any active service yet—I know he would acquit himself well."

"Why, naturally," said Owen.

"Mrs. Oppenshaw," Evangeline continued, "seems quite superstitious about him. She has a fixed idea that he will never come back to England."

"But you," urged Owen, "are superstitious only about one subject."

"My illness, you mean!" cried Evangeline. "Yes, I shall always think of that as being a little outside the ordinary routine of things. Of course, I am quite aware it is extremely stupid of me. But it came about so suddenly—without any sufficient cause. It always seems as if it were intended to teach me a lesson of some kind."

"From one point of view," said Owen, "you may imagine that everything—down to the death of a worm—was predestined from the beginning, but it is rank fatalism."

"In that case, it is ridiculous to—to blame anybody," she suggested a little excitedly.

"Still an action is a circumstance if it isn't a sin," was the answer, "and there are certain circumstances which we avoid if we can."

Owen perceived that, as he had anticipated, Wilmot Norgate occupied more of her thoughts since his departure from London, and this afternoon it seemed almost as if she were trying to make excuses for his behaviour last June. There were moments when Owen became somewhat pessimistic, although he went about his work as usual, trying to show a bold front.

The days of the new year continued to darken, and the second week of January brought the disheartening and perplexing news of Spion Kop. A few mornings later, Owen entered his sitting-room at the hospital at about eight o'clock, poured out his tea, helped himself to bacon, and took up the morning newspaper. Knowing several men at the front, he turned his attention at once to the list of casualties, when his eyes fell on the name of Wilmot Norgate—severely wounded.

It is to be feared that he considered the misfortune entirely from his own standpoint. Wilmot's dearest friend could scarcely have felt more sincere regret! Owen perceived the probable effect on Evangeline, who already showed a tendency to

regard Wilmot with greater toleration. Having little doubt that she also would look down the list, he could not resist going to Portman Square that afternoon, when without any other greeting, she rose impulsively, as he entered her presence, with Norgate's name on her lips.

"I can't get him out of my mind," she said a few minutes later. "I have thought of nothing else since I read his name at breakfast-time. I long to know the nature of his wound, and whether he is being properly cared for! I wonder whether he will be sent home," she added, looking anxiously into Owen's face.

"That depends on the severity of his injury," answered Owen. "'Severe' is to be distinguished from 'dangerous,' you understand."

"Mrs. Oppenshaw will insist that it is entirely my fault," murmured Evangeline.

"Of course that is nonsense!"

"Yet it is true in a manner," she admitted. "Because if it had not been for me he might not have gone."

"Oh, well, if it hadn't been for you it's impossible to tell what might or might not have happened," said Owen. "After all, it seems the natural thing to have done; he is a good shot and a good rider, so that his place was surely there."

"I wish," cried Evangeline, as Owen rose

to go away, "it were possible to learn the details!"

"If they had come to hand," he answered, "no doubt they would have been published. But anyhow, I will go to the War Office to-morrow morning and bring you any news that is to be picked up."

She looked forward with intense eagerness to his return, and in the meantime Wilmot seemed to haunt her thoughts; she tried to imagine the nature of his wound, she pictured his loneliness out there, and wondered whether Mrs. Oppenshaw would prove to be right in predicting that Wilmot would never return to England. Yet, even now, whilst her sympathy was freshest, and her memory frequently went back to the days of last April and May, the happiest days of her engagement, Evangeline felt no wish for its renewal

CHAPTER XVII

NEWS!

OWEN FAIRBANK walked to Pall Mall the following morning, and mingled with the anxious crowd which besieged the War Office for news of their nearest and dearest, but eventually he turned away no wiser than he had come. Nothing concerning Wilmot's wound was known, beyond the scant information that had already been published. At least, however, Owen had an excuse for another visit to Portman Square, although it proved somewhat tantalising to realise the true explanation of Evangeline's impatience to see him. She showed her intense disappointment, while she thanked Owen for the trouble he had taken.

"You see that I am becoming an adept at turning the other cheek," he answered.

"Is it quite fair to suggest that I have smitten you?" she demanded.

Owen lifted his shoulders, and for once Evangeline seemed to obtain a glimpse of what he usually took

effectual means to hide from her. For an instant he lost his self-control.

"Oh, what a pity it seems!" she murmured, and on the momentary impulse she rested a friendly hand on his sleeve.

"What?" he asked, pulling himself together.

"That this should be such a contrarious world! Why can't people be nice and—and companionable without——"

"Well," he answered, forcing a laugh, "that is precisely what I am striving to be, only sometimes one is weak enough to feel as if Fate had gone over to the enemy."

"But you don't believe that what you name Fate troubles about poor mortals?"

"I don't pretend to solve the mystery," said Owen.

"Will it ever be solved?" she cried.

"Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves, you know."

"I don't quite understand——"

"If we peg away at the smaller problems," he explained, "we may possibly have a kind of cumulative effect on the larger."

"Then you would leave the greater questions alone?"

"Oh, well, we can't do that. Man doesn't seem to be made that way. Still, the fact remains that

we know nothing more about the Ultimate than was known thousands of years ago."

"Still, surely we have unlearned something!" she suggested.

"Ah yes, perhaps. But should you thank anyone who took away your old coat without giving you a new one?"

"If it were soiled!"

"In a sense," said Owen, "we are still in the Stone Age——"

"And we are crying for bread," murmured Evangeline.

"The world is a child, yet in the go-cart," he quoted.

"Ah, but you must remember the context," said Evangeline, and he met her eyes with a smile.

"I fancy you have an inherited tendency to controversy," Owen exclaimed; and when he had gone, she realised that, as usual, his visit had left a pleasant savour. It were easy to imagine the possibility of leading a fragrant life with him, for although he went quietly about his work like another, and she knew of nothing in particular that he had done, still he created the impression of a man with lofty ideals—disinterested aims. She did not suppose he was perfect, or that he had not faults like other men, but nevertheless she credited him with a desire to

reach the mountain-tops, while for her own part she longed to mount up beyond the valleys.

She smiled at herself, inasmuch as she could deem him interesting for such characteristics. A year ago she would have put aside the thought with a shrug; he could scarcely have entered into the scheme of her life, and his would have appeared as uninteresting to herself as her own round of pleasure and excitement would have seemed to Owen.

But now her developing ambition took his direction; she told herself he could help her to climb, until presently her thoughts reverted to Wilmot, and if nothing had occurred to alter her most recent estimate, or to make him appear a more desirable husband, it became difficult, now that he was wounded, perhaps unto death, to dwell upon his shortcomings. Pity supplied precisely the touch of emotion which her thoughts of him had come to lack, and Evangeline found herself bridging over their months of estrangement, dwelling once more on the days when they had been all in all to each other. With a forlorn hope of learning more details of his injury, she went to Green Street, but Mrs. Oppenshaw knew only what she had read in the newspaper.

"Poor fellow," she said with a sigh, "he had a presentiment that he should never return. I can see him now as he stood by that window the last

time he came! How terribly despondent he looked! He declared he wished for nothing better than a Mauser bullet in his brain."

"Still," faltered Evangeline, "there is no need to imagine that his wound is mortal."

"Ah, my dear," answered Mrs. Oppenshaw, "it is easier to feel hopeful at your age than at mine. Wilmot is not a saint, and to do him justice he never pretended to be one, but he was very fond of you, and if he dies out there his last thought will be yours."

On the whole, the visit to Green Street proved to be anything rather than an enlivening experience, and seeing tears in Mrs. Oppenshaw's eyes, Evangeline found it difficult to keep her own quite dry. Henceforth, she thought of Wilmot still more frequently, still more compassionately, and no woman in London searched the newspaper columns with intenser anxiety. But, for one reason or another, after the first announcement of his wound, Evangeline read the lists in vain; the weeks passed slowly by; January ended, and February began in deep national stress until the news of the relief of Kimberley was followed by that of General Cronje's surrender at Paardeberg.

It was about the middle of March that Evangeline received a visit from Mrs. Oppenshaw, evidently in a state of considerable excitement.

"I had a letter from Mrs. Norgate yesterday,"

she exclaimed, as soon as she was seated. "I wrote some time ago, begging her to forward any information about Wilmot. He has sailed from Cape Town on the *Tuscan*!"

"When—when is the vessel due?" faltered Evangeline.

"In twelve days or a fortnight," said Mrs. Oppenshaw. "But I shall send to the shipping office to ascertain the exact date. I thought you would like to hear," she added, with a shrewd glance into Evangeline's face.

"I suppose," was the answer, "if—if he had perfectly recovered he would have rejoined his regiment?"

"I have told you all I know," cried Mrs. Oppenshaw. "He sent Mrs. Norgate only a few lines, stating his intention to sail on the *Tuscan*. I don't imagine anything has occurred to detain him. He said nothing about his injuries. Now," Mrs. Oppenshaw continued, as she rose from her chair, "if you come to see me in a few days' time, I shall be able to tell you when the ship is due at Southampton."

Judging from Evangeline's demeanour, since she had known Wilmot was wounded, Mrs. Oppenshaw felt very little doubt that, on his return to England, he would obtain his heart's desire. It seemed perfectly natural that Evangeline should have found it difficult to forgive him, equally natural

that his adversity should have softened her heart. For her own part, Mrs. Oppenshaw determined to leave no stone unturned to bring the two happily together again.

Evangeline walked slowly homewards, able to think of nothing but Wilmot's impending return. When she had imagined him at death's-door, her heart had gone out to him, if not quite so unreservedly as in the former days; but now that she pictured him on the road to health, her feelings underwent a slight revulsion. If she met him in a few weeks' time, he would probably be just the same as when she parted from him last, and she wondered whether her own emotions would be different!

Already she found herself able to consider his advantages and disadvantages; again her cheeks tingled when she recollected certain painful interviews, again she could deliberately compare him with Owen Fairbank. On reaching Portman Square she experienced a curious disinclination to mention his name, and although she spent an hour with her father before dinner, she said nothing about Wilmot's return to England.

But she tried to understand, at least, her own wishes on the subject, perceiving that these could not reasonably be influenced by his state of health. And yet, reasonably or unreasonably, Evangeline

had to admit that his condition was a not unimportant factor. At moments when she imagined him the same as she had always known him, she remembered the affronts he had put upon her, and perceived that deep sympathy between them was impossible. But at other moments, realising that he might be only the wreck of himself, she forgot everything but her fervent desire to alleviate his lot.

Amidst many inconsistencies, one result stood plainly forth: whether or not it were desirable to yield to what she never doubted would still be Wilmot's entreaties, whether or not she could be happy as his wife—it had become impossible to dream of marrying any other man—to put it plainly, to dream of marrying Owen. If there had been times when his comradeship seemed to be the best thing that life could offer, Evangeline perceived this afternoon, with fresh distinctness, that whilst Wilmot could claim so much it would be unfair to let Owen take what was left.

After dinner that evening, she at last made up her mind to tell Mr. Maitland of Wilmot's embarkation for Southampton, and at a little before ten o'clock she entered the smoking-room.

"Well," said Mr. Maitland, after thinking over her announcement in silence for a few minutes, "what is to be the next development?"

"Has anything happened to make any difference?" she asked.

"My dear child, if you sow a seed you may say that nothing happens to make it grow. As a matter of fact something is always happening: the sun shines, the rain falls—and all the rest of it."

"There doesn't seem to have been much sunshine lately!" murmured Evangeline.

"We've brighter days before us," cried her father. "But let us keep to one thing at a time. Of course, I understand that pity is akin to love, and since his misfortune, I suspect you have half-regretted letting Norgate go."

"Whenever I saw him," said Evangeline quietly, "I couldn't help asking myself what would happen if I—if I were to be transformed again."

"No doubt," was the answer, "the average man will generally prefer a pretty woman to a plain one!"

"Oh yes, I don't pretend it isn't pleasant to be admired," exclaimed Evangeline, "or that I should care to look grotesque for ever. But still I feel I should like to be—to be loved not only for my face—"

"If it isn't a woman's face that attracts a man, in the first place," said Mr. Maitland, "it's a curve of her figure, a passing expression, a tress of hair on her neck, or some ridiculously inadequate thing of

that sort. Still, from such a trivial beginning the purest and truest love may certainly develop."

"But if the face or—or whatever it may be—change——"

"That kind of love remains," answered Mr. Maitland promptly. "It is eternal."

She saw a wistful expression come over his face, and fancying that perhaps his thoughts had gone back to the days before she was born, Evangeline made no attempt to break the silence.

"It may come to the richest or to the poorest," Mr. Maitland solemnly continued. "It's life's best gift. It doesn't prevent misunderstandings, disagreements, even unhappiness—more's the pity! but nevertheless it's a consecration."

"One would like to be loved in that way," she murmured.

"Then for goodness' sake don't dream of looking back," said Mr. Maitland.

"You—you don't think that Wilmot——"

"You have had an excellent opportunity to judge his capacity," was the answer.

She could not prevent herself from thinking of Owen at this juncture, with something like a wish that he had earlier crossed her path. But Wilmot had crossed it instead, and it seemed that he had blocked the way for anyone else, even if she could not traverse it with him. Mr. Maitland would

have rejoiced to see her throw in her lot with Owen, but, at the same time, having done his best to prevent any misconception of Wilmot's character, he was not prepared to offer active opposition to the course she might determine to pursue. Seeing Owen the next day, Evangeline explained, without any of the excitement which she had betrayed when she had spoken of Wilmot's wound some time ago, that he was returning to England. After a few moments' silence, Owen mustered a smile as he looked into her face.

"So all's well with the world!" he said.

"You will never admit that it is," she answered.

"If you had gone through my experiences in the out-patients' room this morning, you would be disposed to agree with me," he insisted.

"Still it sounds terribly pessimistic!"

"I don't see the use of crying peace where there is no peace," he said. "Besides, I am not suggesting that nothing is well, because all is not. One can try to make it better, you know."

"How splendid it must be," she cried, "when one's ordinary daily work consists in doing that."

"Yes, isn't it?" he answered cheerfully, and then he inquired when the *Tuscan* would be due. This information she was unable to impart, although when, according to Mrs. Oppenshaw's suggestion,

Evangeline went to Green Street, she learned the probable date of Wilmot's arrival.

"Is he going to stay with his own people?" she asked.

"They don't seem to know anything about his movements," was the answer.

"Of course," said Evangeline, "they will meet the vessel?"

"My dear," cried Mrs. Oppenshaw scornfully, "they are too much concerned with their own ailments to think of such a thing. But I can't tolerate the idea of there being no one to give him a welcome, and I have made up my mind to go to Southampton a day or two before the *Tuscan* is due."

CHAPTER XVIII

AT SOUTHAMPTON

THE journey to Southampton at this time of year seemed a somewhat bold venture for a woman of Mrs. Oppenshaw's age, although nobody knew precisely what this might be. But her interest in Wilmot Norgate was acute. Having outlived many of her own family, and having lost her three children years ago, there remained no one of whom she was more deeply fond. From recent observation of Evangeline, she believed that she could greet Wilmot with news which would go far towards his complete restoration to health.

For, picturing him as still to some extent an invalid, Mrs. Oppenshaw consequently felt more sympathetic than ever. He might have lost a leg or an arm, and in any event he could scarcely fail to be extremely pleased to find her waiting to welcome him.

Travelling entirely alone, she reached Southampton two days before the *Tuscan* was due, and went direct from the railway station to an old-

fashioned hotel, where she had stayed many years ago, near the Toll-bar. Wishing to meet Wilmot on the quay, yet to avoid standing about in the prevalent cold winds, she took the precaution to speak to the hotel manager, who undertook to let her know what time the ship was expected. At breakfast, two mornings after her arrival, she heard that the *Tuscan* would reach her berth at about eleven o'clock that day, and enveloped in a long sable cloak, Mrs. Oppenshaw set forth in a closed carriage, and presently formed one of an expectant group at the dock, whilst the huge vessel, high out of the water, glided slowly towards the quay. Her deck was thronged with soldiers, returning from the war, many of whom still bore marks of the fray: some with arms in slings, some on crutches, some looking pale and worn as they pressed against the chains at the side of the vessel.

Holding her long-handled spectacles in position, Mrs. Oppenshaw strove to distinguish Wilmot amongst the crowd on the after-deck, and presently, although his face was turned away, she fancied she recognised his tall, erect figure. Becoming more certain of his identity, she drew a breath of intense relief, for at least he had not, apparently, sustained any lasting injury. He stood talking to a woman who wore a blue yachting-cap and a loose ulster coat, which completely enveloped her small figure.

She had dark hair ; her face, undoubtedly attractive, was noticeably powdered, and she looked perhaps thirty years of age. As the *Tuscan's* screw ceased to go round, men began to make her fast to the quay, while the steam cranes were already at work, and Wilmot's companion drew his attention to a small body of soldiers on shore. Turning to look at the detachment, he showed Mrs. Oppenshaw his face, and dropping her spectacles, she could scarcely suppress a cry of pain.

She had never known a handsomer man than Wilmot had been on bidding her farewell in such a melancholy state of mind a few months ago, but now a terrible change had come upon him. A fragment of shell, almost spent, had struck him on the right cheek, and the scar, which still looked somewhat red and angry, extended from the temple to the lowest part of the chin, involving the eyelid and the corner of the mouth, with lamentable effect. For the rest, invigorated by the voyage from the Cape, he had never been stronger ; his face was deeply tanned, and he carried himself as upright as ver.

He recognised Mrs. Oppenshaw at the same moment that she was startled out of her self-control by his appearance, and with a frown of disapproval, he whispered a few words to his companion, before turning towards the ladder.

After being hidden from Mrs. Oppenshaw for a few minutes, he reappeared on the gangway, and the next instant she was holding out both hands to welcome him. But his response proved less cordial than she deserved; she might have been a mere acquaintance instead of his oldest friend, and she had never known him to show such embarrassment before.

"I couldn't endure the idea of there being no one to welcome you home again," she exclaimed, as he withdrew his hands. "I am going back this afternoon, and I want you to accompany me. You must make Green Street your headquarters for the next week or two."

"Upon my word, I'm afraid I can't," he answered.

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Of course it's most awfully good of you," he muttered.

"Why can't you stay with me?" she persisted.

"The—the fact is," he returned, and he looked extremely ill at ease, "I'm just off to Bournemouth for a few weeks."

She had refrained from raising her glasses again, although she was half blind without them, because she could not bear to see his great disfigurement, and she assumed that he shrank from showing himself to the people he knew in London; one of

whom, however, at least, was now certain to have a cordial welcome for him !

The crowd on the quay pressed uncomfortably about Mrs. Oppenshaw, and she looked up with anxiety at the huge packages which the steam cranes were suspending over her head. Hoping to prevail with Wilmot, if she could only speak to him alone for a few minutes, she suggested that he should return to luncheon at her hotel.

"You see," he answered, "I am obliged to stay to look after my traps."

"Then perhaps you will join me by half-past one," she urged.

"You will have to let me off luncheon," said Wilmot. "But I'll come to see you for a quarter of an hour on my way to the station."

With this Mrs. Oppenshaw was compelled to be contented, and re-entering the carriage which had waited a few yards from the quay, she was driven back to the hotel, where about three-quarters of an hour later she was joined by Wilmot. She could not help observing a peculiar moroseness in his manner, and as he stood talking in her private sitting-room, his eyes constantly sought the clock. He made no reference to his wound, and for her own part Mrs. Oppenshaw did not possess sufficient courage to refer to it. In vain she tried to persuade him to stay with her in Green Street,

if only for a few days, and at last, as an irresistible inducement, she mentioned the name of Evangeline.

"I saw Evangeline only a few days ago," she remarked. "She has been immensely concerned about you since she heard of your wound."

But Wilmot had returned to England without the slightest inclination towards an undertaking, into which he might still have thrown himself with ardour if he had believed there was the remotest hope of success. He had, however, given up the idea of making Evangeline his wife after that last interview in Portman Square. He had, indeed, turned from her with a certain asperity, none the less because, by this time, he had learned to blame himself for the change, which it seemed impossible to deny, had occurred in her regard.

Whilst Wilmot had lain helpless after his wound, wavering for a time between life and death, he had lived again through the days of his engagement to Evangeline: undoubtedly the period of his manhood to which he could look back with the purest gratification. But even after all danger was past, and during the idle days of convalescence, his hopes never revived. He believed that, thanks perhaps to Owen Fairbank, Evangeline was irretrievably lost. Advised that the voyage was necessary for his complete restoration, Wilmot had

sailed for Southampton, still without the remotest intention again to approach her.

On board the *Tuscan* he met Mrs. Rivers, and saw no reason for resisting her advances. She had been divorced by Captain Rivers a few years ago, and whilst not without a kind of refinement, she was neither more nor less than an adventuress. At least she served to beguile the days during the homeward voyage.

When Mrs. Oppenshaw now mentioned Evangeline's name, Wilmot turned towards the window.

"That," he muttered, "is all done with."

"Oh, but why should you be so despondent," cried Mrs. Oppenshaw. "For my part, I think it might just be beginning."

"Have you any definite reason for saying that?" he demanded, facing her again abruptly.

"What do you mean by a definite reason?"

"Evangeline has not — not told you anything——"

"Do you imagine it is possible?" was the answer. "But I flatter myself I have all my senses about me, and I ought to be able to understand a girl of two-and-twenty by this time."

"Have you ever met a man named Fairbank in Portman Square?" asked Wilmot.

"I have certainly heard of him," said Mrs. Oppenshaw. "But I am not speaking without

cause. Be sensible, take my advice and come with me to Green Street."

"No," answered Wilmot gloomily. "If I thought there was a chance, I would go. But she showed me as plainly as a woman could that she didn't care a rap, and that was the end of it."

"Well," cried Mrs. Oppenshaw, "I can't help thinking you are losing an opportunity."

He bade her good-bye the next minute, telling himself that Mrs. Oppenshaw's wish must be father to that thought. From the outset, she had been extremely desirous to bring about the marriage, and now she blinded herself to the obvious facts of the case! Nevertheless, her words served to re-awaken, somewhat tantalisingly, the recollection of what might have been, and on reaching the door of the hotel, Wilmot stood with a scowl on his face, his moustache drawn in between his teeth, wavering as to his next step. It would still be possible, though a little embarrassing, to alter his arrangements, and for a few moments he stood irresolute; then taking out his case, he lighted a cigarette and walked away along the High Street.

That afternoon Mrs. Oppenshaw returned to London, with one definite purpose in her mind. Feeling alarmed by Wilmot's demeanour, she looked to Evangeline to alleviate it, being in a manner somewhat unscrupulous, since she told

herself that any means were justifiable to attain such an excellent end as his marriage.

But while (knowing Evangeline) she counted on his injury as her most potent weapon, she was far from imagining its full effect until she went to Portman Square two days later.

"I meant to come to see you yesterday," she began, "but I really felt too completely disheartened."

"About — about Wilmot?" cried Evangeline apprehensively.

"You would scarcely recognise him!" said Mrs. Oppenshaw.

"Then he—he hasn't perfectly recovered——"

"For that matter," was the answer, "he is as strong as ever, but his face has undergone the most terrible disfigurement you can conceive!"

Evangeline sat staring blankly before her, quite unaware of the duration of her silence. To save her life she felt that she could not speak, while she remained wholly unconscious of Mrs. Oppenshaw's close and triumphant observation; exaggerating Wilmot's misfortune as if it must prove as disastrous and overwhelming to him as it would have been to herself.

"You know he used to be a handsome man," Mrs. Oppenshaw remorselessly continued. "But now," she cried with a shudder, "there is an

enormous scar down the right side of his face. One eye is almost closed, and his mouth is horribly distorted. He has often sat on my knee as a child, yet somehow I felt like a stranger to him. He shrank even from such an old friend as myself, and I saw him only for ten minutes."

"Then you didn't bring him back with you?" faltered Evangeline.

"He has gone to Bournemouth," said Mrs. Oppenshaw. "His chief desire in life is to hide himself from everybody who knew him."

"Poor Wilmot!" murmured Evangeline, and as if in spite of herself, her heart went out towards him, so that the few minutes of Mrs. Oppenshaw's visit had accomplished more than anything that had gone before. It was not only that Evangeline was stirred by the deepest pity, but always having regarded her own disfigurement from a half-superstitious standpoint, there now seemed to be something significant in Wilmot's similar infliction. This appeared, as it were, to round off the episode, and Wilmot at least could scarcely miss its moral.

It was as if the finger of fate were pointing out her own direction!

"I am afraid," Mrs. Oppenshaw continued, "that he takes things rather badly. The strongest men often bear infirmities the worst. He seemed curi-

ously taciturn—morose; as if his mood were rebellious, even dangerous.”

“Dangerous!”

“My dear, there is nothing more disastrous than to be driven to the conclusion that one is being made the sport of circumstances. You may imagine Wilmot’s feelings. I disliked to part from him. It struck me he was in a temper to consider life scarcely worth living.”

“Oh don’t, pray don’t suggest anything of that kind!” murmured Evangeline, with a shudder; and she had by no means recovered her self-possession when the door opened and Owen Fairbank entered the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XIX

A REVOLUTION

FOR once in her experience, Evangeline devoutly wished that Owen had stayed away ; she gave him a cold hand, and refrained from introducing him to Mrs. Oppenshaw, who nevertheless inspected him shrewdly as she rose to say good-bye.

When Owen returned to his chair after closing the door, Evangeline tried to steady her thoughts sufficiently to carry on an ordinary conversation ; not that her talks with Fairbank were often quite ordinary, since he seldom met her without some reference to his own aims, and often to Wilmot Norgate's.

The two men seemed sometimes to be woven into Evangeline's life, like two threads in a tapestry, both being, in a way, necessary to the design.

"I see that the *Tuscan* has arrived," said Owen.

"Mrs. Oppenshaw has just returned from Southampton," was the answer.

"Is Norgate fairly strong again?" Owen inquired, somewhat perfunctorily; and with obvious emotion, Evangeline repeated what she had recently heard, while Owen listened with a disappointment which he took care to disguise.

"After all," he said, "painful as it is, it must be better than the loss of a limb."

"I cannot forget my own sensations," she returned.

"But a man would take that kind of thing differently," Owen insisted. "The loss of her beauty might seem to be a woman's worst disaster, but although I don't wish to belittle Norgate's misfortune, I feel certain you make more of it than he is likely to do."

"Mrs. Oppenshaw declares that he takes it very much to heart," said Evangeline. "He could not bear to talk about it; he scarcely liked to see her; he seems fearfully depressed and despondent."

"Oh well, that might be due to any one of half a dozen causes," he answered. "A little unusual weakness—even to want of exercise during the voyage."

Her face wore a sceptical expression, and for a few moments she remained silent, then with a peculiar hesitation she said—

"You — you know that I was always a little superstitious——"

"You thought the powers that be deliberately set to work to transform you!"

"I will not attempt to argue!" she exclaimed. "There are plenty of things one can't argue about, and yet one is absolutely convinced of their truth."

"Personally," he said, with a rueful smile, "I have been particularly clever at persuading myself without the remotest reason."

"I find it difficult to believe," she insisted, "that there is not some kind of connection between Wilmot's injury and my own, only his is infinitely worse, because he cannot have the least hope of being cured."

"The music of the spheres has been interrupted," cried Owen, "for the sake of a didactic experiment."

"You know," said Evangeline, with a thoughtful expression, "that a quotation often has an unintended application, and yet everybody gives its author the credit. If a phrase written a thousand years ago seems to apply to a modern instance, we say the writer was a seer, although very likely he meant nothing of the kind. And why," she asked, "when an incident in ordinary life appears to point a moral, should we go out of our way to divert it?"

"What," asked Owen, "is supposed to be the moral in the present case?"

"Oh, I can't explain," cried Evangeline, flushing almost painfully.

"You prefer to content yourself with a description of the symptoms, leaving me to make my own diagnosis! Then, of course," he added, "you have not seen Norgate yet?"

"He has gone to Bournemouth," she answered. "He refused to face his friends in London."

"But they are honourable scars," said Owen, "and upon my word, it is difficult to understand why he should object to show them." Then Owen drew a little closer, and taking her hand, stood looking down into her agitated face. "Is the interregnum going to end at last?" he asked; and glancing up rather pitifully, Evangeline sent him away with the question unanswered.

While he perceived that he had every reason for despondency, he determined to try to keep hope alive until the definite word was spoken. What appeared to be reawakening love, might prove, in fact, nothing more than a reminiscence; as when one's thoughts go back to a former home and one is impelled to revisit the scene only to meet with disillusionment. A few minutes and every topic of common interest becomes exhausted; the old place has lost its charm, the old friends have been

outgrown. Owen tried to persuade himself that this might prove to be the case in the present instance, but indeed Evangeline had grown blind to all those drawbacks and differences to which she had recently attached such weight.

It seemed arrogant, now, to imagine herself in any way superior to Wilmot, who had played a man's part at the crisis, and acted entirely as honour and duty demanded. He had fought for his country and been wounded in the cause! She no longer insisted on those incompatibilities of aim and endeavour which had formerly occupied her thoughts, assuring herself it were absurd to imagine she had drifted apart from Wilmot, since she longed to carry him consolation and sympathy.

When Mr. Maitland re-entered the house, she ran excitedly to meet him in the hall, and leading him to the smoking-room before he had time to remove his hat, repeated once more the news which Mrs. Oppenshaw had brought a little while ago. When she ceased speaking, he bared his head, and taking a pipe from the mantelshelf slowly filled and lighted it. Evangeline perceived that her father was not entirely sympathetic, although he had heard her out without interruption.

"Do you recollect," he asked, sitting down and leaning back in his chair, "a talk we had a little while ago?"

"What was it about?"

"Oh, well, we were perhaps a little high falutin'. We discussed the nature of romantic love as well as that which is not very romantic."

"Still," she exclaimed, "I am not certain that all you said was justified. You had no actual reason for suggesting that Wilmot was incapable of—of that kind of thing."

"My dear child," said Mr. Maitland, "I am a man of the world."

"You frequently tell me I should define my terms, father!"

"Well, one has lost one's youthful enthusiasms and ceased to look for exceptional virtue. There's a tendency to tar all with the same brush, and injustice is accepted without a murmur. While one doesn't expect to find one righteous man in Israel, one makes free allowance for the unrighteous."

He had a hesitancy in touching some subjects concerning which he yet felt deeply, the peccadilloes of his own youth sometimes seeming to prevent even the bestowal of good advice. It appeared a comparatively easy matter to be staid in the autumn of life, while Mr. Maitland did not feel certain that cakes and ale were always to be dispensed with in the spring. The past few months had afforded him a deeper

insight into Evangeline's character, but even to-day there might be something almost priggish in the hint of her capacity for a higher life. Nevertheless, he could not entirely put aside the feeling that her threatened re-engagement to Wilmot Norgate would be a step backwards, albeit he experienced considerable embarrassment in touching the subject. Nor, should he, in the last resource, think of attempting to interfere with her determination.

"Are you suggesting," asked Evangeline, "that it is necessary to make any special allowance for Wilmot?"

"Carry back your thoughts to the middle of last June," answered Mr. Maitland.

"Ah yes, I know," she cried. "But I can't think of that to-day! I only remember what has happened to him; it must seem like a judgment, and his feelings must be very—very bitter."

"Then you take his constancy for granted?" her father suggested.

"Unreservedly!"

Mr. Maitland's face grew grave, as he stood looking down at Evangeline.

"And if Norgate should ask you to renew the engagement——" he began, when she interrupted him impetuously.

"He never will ask me," she said.

"He hasn't seemed particularly backward hitherto!"

"No, but Wilmot will remember how he behaved to me. He cannot help asking himself what my treatment of him would be. He will never put it to the test!"

"Well," said Mr. Maitland, "you give the fellow credit for a good deal of sensitiveness. I should scarcely have expected it from him."

But still measuring Wilmot's corn by her own bushel, Evangeline felt confident that she understood all that was passing in his mind at the present time. She lay awake thinking of him late that night, and the next morning seemed like an anti-climax. She awoke with a sense of expectancy, as if something critical were going to occur during the day, and its ordinary routine appeared entirely out of harmony with her excited, emotional condition. It ended without any uncommon incident, however; Mr. Maitland going out of his way to avoid the mention of Wilmot's name.

The occupation of Bloemfontein had raised the spirits of the nation, although various depressing items of news still mitigated the general satisfaction. That part of London which had constituted Evangeline's world, was not at present very gay;

it was the calm before the storm of the season, she had few engagements to divert her mind, even if it had been capable of fixing upon any other subject than Wilmot.

She lived in a condition of nervous expectancy, as if important events might come to pass at any hour; but yet, as the days went by, she became more and more confident (as she had told her father) that Wilmot would never take the initiative. She imagined him pining in the dulness of Bournemouth—lonely, retrospective, yearning, self-reproachful; and by and by, becoming impatient for further news of him, Evangeline went to Green Street, where, indeed, Mrs. Oppenshaw had been expecting to see her earlier.

Mrs. Oppenshaw mentioned Wilmot's name before she had been five minutes in the house.

"I wrote to Mrs. Norgate," she explained, "and learnt that he was living at the Beacon Hotel at Boscombe. Then I filled a whole sheet of notepaper trying to induce him to come to stay with me here. He answered with just four or five lines——"

"Declining?" asked Evangeline.

"Positively—one might almost say ungraciously. The poor fellow must be half beside himself,

and I hate the notion of his being left in solitude."

"Why," suggested Evangeline, "don't you go to Boscombe?"

Mrs. Oppenshaw sorrowfully shook her head.

"There's only one person in the world who could do him the slightest good," was the answer, which sent Evangeline home with a determined expression on her face; it had become rather pale during the last few days. The present strain felt well-nigh unendurable, while the future seemed to rest absolutely with herself. Mr. Maitland might indeed raise an objection to the course which she had almost determined on pursuing, but it was scarcely probable that he would ultimately attempt to restrain her complete liberty of action. It must be absurd to allow any notion of false delicacy to prevent her from going to Wilmot's succour.

As when, losing one who used to be dear, you bridge over the later, less harmonious years, and dwell rather upon days before the beginning of discord, so Evangeline ignored all that had occurred since the rupture of her engagement, and looked back to those happier weeks when she expected to become Wilmot's wife. Thinking of him as her lover she soon found it difficult to realise that their close confidence had ever

been interrupted save by absence. In those days it had been easy to open her heart to him, and now in these, the former intimacy appeared so real, so present, that the step which she was beginning to contemplate possessed few terrors.

Whilst scarcely admitting the possibility to herself, it may have been that she gloried in her power to heap coals of fire on his head; to show Wilmot that his misfortune, far from lessening her love, had actually quickened it; for had it not seemed to be dead until the news of his injury brought it again to life?

After dinner that evening, she went upstairs alone as usual, and for an hour or longer sat idly staring at the fire, but then with an air of immense determination she rose, descending to the smoking-room.

"Father," she said, taking her favourite seat on the arm of Mr. Maitland's chair, "I am going to ask you to do something for me."

"Well, what is it?" he demanded, turning to look at her face, and observing its heightened colour, as her breath came and went quickly.

"Something I am very—very keen about," she insisted.

"Tell me what it is," said Mr. Maitland.

"I—I should like you to say 'yes' without asking any questions, father!"

"Come—tell me," he urged, resting a hand on her arm ; and suddenly bending towards him, she hid her face against his shoulder.

"I want you to—to take me to Bournemouth," she whispered.

CHAPTER XX

AT BOURNEMOUTH

FOR a few minutes there was perfect silence, while Evangeline still hid her face, and Mr. Maitland continued to smoke with a very thoughtful expression.

"Wouldn't it be reversing the usual order of things?" he suggested.

"I—I can't talk about it," she murmured, raising her head and looking steadily into his eyes. "But I want you very much to take me."

Still he did not answer for a few minutes longer, whilst he tried to grasp Evangeline's point of view: the highest endeavour of sympathy. It appeared that she had made up her mind, and after all it was not as if she had never been affianced to Norgate. Mr. Maitland told himself that the rupture might have come to seem little more than a lovers' quarrel to Evangeline, whereas she was sufficiently generous to make the overture for peace. Although he would have preferred to see her hold aloof, being a woman of full age he

admitted her right of private judgment; and while he could not persuade himself that Norgate was by any means worthy of Evangeline, he appeared neither better nor worse than he had been when Mr. Maitland gave his consent to the engagement last year.

"When should you like to go?" he asked quietly.

"We—we might get away by Monday," she answered, and as she spoke she leaned forward gratefully to kiss him. The following morning Mr. Maitland wrote to the manager of the Sovereign Hotel at Bournemouth, engaging a sitting-room and three bedrooms,—one for himself, one for Evangeline, one for Biggs; and on the Saturday afternoon previous to his departure, he was walking along Oxford Street, near the Marble Arch, when he met Owen Fairbank.

"I had an idea of coming to see you to-morrow afternoon," cried Owen, as he shook hands.

"Very pleased," was the answer. "By the bye," Mr. Maitland added, "Evangeline and I are off to Bournemouth on Monday morning."

It was not the first time that he had had cause to admire Owen's self-control, although for an instant, it is true, Fairbank could think of nothing to say.

"Rather jolly to get away from these biting

winds," he exclaimed the next moment. "Are you likely to be long absent?"

"Heaven only knows," said Mr. Maitland. "I am simply being dragged there. I am not in the least a free agent."

He walked away with a laugh, speculating whether or not Owen would still come to Portman Square on Sunday afternoon; when, however, the visitor entered the drawing-room, at a little past four o'clock, Evangeline was alone, while Mr. Maitland had fallen asleep downstairs in the smoking-room.

"So you are off to Bournemouth to-morrow," said Owen, a few minutes after his arrival. "I thought you might not mind my coming——"

"Have I ever shown the least objection to your visits?" cried Evangeline, almost reproachfully.

"Still," he continued, "I can't resist the notion that there may be something of finality about the present farewell."

Her eyes rested a moment on his calm, purposeful face, and suddenly she grew conscious of a sense of regret.

"I should be very sorry," she murmured.

"Isn't that a little inconsistent?" he exclaimed. "I suppose no woman was ever more completely the mistress of her fate."

Evangeline leaned back somewhat wearily in her chair, gazing at the fire.

"Can't you understand," she said, "that on the eve of a journey, although one would not forego it, yet one may feel sorry to—to leave one's friends? But," she added, forcing a smile, "it is probably quite a misplaced regret! They quickly forget——"

"You know better than that," he answered bluntly.

Evangeline shrugged her shoulders with an attempt to treat the subject lightly.

"Nobody is indispensable," she continued. "By and by you will marry and live happily ever after—at least I hope you will live happily."

"I make no protestations," said Owen. "It is dangerous to prophesy. But even if you should some day hear of my marriage—though I can't conceive it—it would not follow that I had forgotten."

"In that case," cried Evangeline, with more sincerity in her voice, "you will wish that we had never met."

"No, I shall never be able to wish that," he answered.

"You almost make me wish it!" she murmured. "But," she added hastily, "only for—for your own sake."

"It seems to me," he said, leaning forward, with

his hands clasped round one knee, "that you are like a person who finds a fresh fact in conflict with an old belief."

"Were you the—the fresh fact?" she demanded, while her thoughts wandered back to the first days of their friendship.

"It's impossible," he urged, "for you to ignore all that has passed between us."

"I begin to realise that I was wrong to permit it," said Evangeline, with a sigh, for she felt something approaching actual pain at the suggested end to their intimacy, which perhaps had never seemed quite so precious as at this moment. She perceived that the common spirit of sympathy that subsisted beneath all their differences of opinion must inevitably be lacking between herself and Wilmot. She could not expect from him the same cheerfully serious purpose, the keen, alert interest in all that was best in the world, the wide tolerance which characterised Owen Fairbank. Wilmot, indeed, had always been easily bored, and sometimes he seemed to pride himself upon this capacity, as if it showed a superiority to those smaller facts on which the chief happiness of life may be said to depend. Nevertheless, her heart had gone out to him, and she felt impatient to leave London to-morrow in spite of her regret on saying good-bye to Owen.

"You were not wrong," he insisted. "Although unfortunately the old tradition has proved too strong to be overcome."

"Are—are you suggesting that I tried to overcome it?" asked Evangeline.

"I fancy that might have turned the scale," said Owen. "There was a time when a little more would have been very much indeed. I can't help seeing I have been close to my goal——"

"It doesn't seem quite like you to dwell upon what might have been," she returned ; but before Owen could find time to say anything more, Mr. Maitland entered the room, and the two were not left alone together again that day. Owen stayed some time longer, however, then rose from his chair and bade Evangeline good-bye just as if he expected to meet her on the usual terms to-morrow.

Although he was not given to much emotional display, there seemed to be a lack of the dramatic in his departure, for while it would no doubt be easy to meet Evangeline in her new circumstances, he felt scarcely equal to the ordeal. In going to Bournemouth she would be practically throwing herself into Norgate's arms ; a fact the more vexatious because, rightly or wrongly, Owen believed that he had a perfect understanding of the psychology of the case—indeed, there were,

perhaps, few things which he did not think he understood.

Owen believed that Evangeline's normal sensations formed a truer measure of her condition than those which had been called into play under the excitement of the last few weeks. He suspected, even, a little hysteria; thinking that by and by, after she had come into contact with Norgate again, she would awaken to her lamentable mistake. But the fact remained that to-morrow she was going to Bournemouth with an olive branch in her hand, so that as far as Owen was concerned, this episode in his life seemed to be ended—in a somewhat flat and unsatisfactory manner.

But for Evangeline it appeared that a new epoch was to begin with her journey to Bournemouth, where she arrived at five o'clock on Monday afternoon, and was at once driven to the Sovereign Hotel. Although the large hotel stood in a secluded road, which contained an avenue of rather melancholy-looking fir-trees, the windows of Mr. Maitland's suite of rooms overlooked the cliff-walk to Boscombe, and the sea beyond. On the cliff, during the ensuing two or three days, Evangeline spent much of her time; the weather was fine and warm, and even when she was not out of doors, she could sit by the open window

of her sitting-room, always on the look-out for Wilmot, although it was not until Friday morning that her endeavours met with success.

Finding the time hang somewhat heavily on hand, Mr. Maitland after dinner on Thursday, suggested a flying visit to London the following day, and as soon as breakfast was finished on Friday morning, Evangeline accompanied her father to the railway station, saw his train depart, and afterwards, with a book in her hand, found a sunny seat on the cliff. At a little past twelve, she returned to the hotel, and standing at her bedroom window she saw Wilmot stop to light a cigarette with his back turned towards her. In this position, he appeared in every way unaltered, but the moment he began to continue his walk to Boscombe her eyes filled with tears.

“Poor Wilmot!” she cried, with no one to overhear, and from that instant her already ardent desire to bestow sympathy and consolation increased a hundredfold. Evangeline was carried away, as never before in her life, by an overmastering emotion, than which nothing could have been more different from passion in its ordinary desire to gratify one’s sense. Of passion, the self is a necessary accompaniment, but Evangeline sought only to ameliorate Wilmot’s condition—unfortunate as she conceived it to be. For,

when she thought about herself, since Sunday's interview with Owen, she was not always without misgiving, but when she remembered Wilmot, she threw aside discretion and longed to bestow upon him, for his own sake, that which she believed he the most valued in the world.

Instead of going as usual to the coffee-room for luncheon, she ordered it to be served in the sitting-room, and while trifling over the meal, Evangeline assured herself again and again, that there could, in the circumstances, be no shadow of impropriety in carrying out her plan. Nor did it seem likely that anyone but Wilmot himself could ever suspect what she had done; one word to him would be sufficient; indeed, even a word would be unnecessary, because the mere sight of her would enlighten him concerning his great good fortune: as such he could not fail to regard it!

Still, she felt a little timorous when at half-past three o'clock that Friday afternoon, she left the Sovereign Hotel, and walking to Christchurch Road, engaged a cab to take her the short distance to Boscombe. On coming within sight of Wilmot's hotel, she stopped the cab, alighted, paid the fare and strolled slowly towards the garden leading to the chief entrance. Now, she felt hesitant, nervous, even conscious of a warning voice within

herself which suggested the possible unwisdom of her course. The excitement that had urged her on seemed to fade away, leaving behind it something of the nature of doubt.

Determining not to go beyond the entrance, Evangeline rehearsed the message which she would send to Wilmot, requesting him to come down to speak to her. With what overwhelming delight he would hear her name! How promptly he would answer! Doubtless he would accompany her back to Bournemouth, and when she parted from him at the Sovereign, she would invite him to dine on her father's return that evening.

She passed into the garden at the open gateway, and crossing the well-rolled gravel-path, observed that the building had a deserted, out-of-season appearance, and wondered how Wilmot (so easily bored) managed to kill time. In the middle of the doorway stood a waiter who obviously had nothing to do.

"Is Mr. Norgate staying here?" asked Evangeline.

The waiter inspected her somewhat curiously—impudently, she thought—as he twisted a napkin between his fingers.

"Yes, madame."

"Is he at home?"

"No, madame, Mr. Norgate went out directly he finished lunch; but," he added, "Mrs. Norgate is in her room."

"Mrs.—Mrs. Norgate," faltered Evangeline, taking an involuntary step backwards.

"Mrs. Norgate ordered a carriage at four o'clock," said the waiter, and as he spoke the lift came to a standstill in the vestibule, a few yards away, a red-haired boy threw open the gate, and out stepped the woman to whom Wilmot had been talking on the deck of the *Tuscan*. "That's Mrs. Norgate," the waiter explained. "What name shall I tell her?"

But turning away without a word, almost as if she felt afraid of being detained and confronted with "Mrs. Norgate" against her will, Evangeline walked swiftly across the garden, through the gateway, up the steep sandy path to the top of the cliff. Her outlook had changed as the face of a thriving land after a hurricane; everything had suddenly become bare and arid—a scene of monotonous desolation. Until now, the future had always seemed to be at her own decision; and while she might hesitate, Wilmot's wishes had never appeared doubtful! Evangeline, toiling up the sandy slope in the sun, upbraided herself for the vanity which had been the sorry foundation of her confidence. A few fleecy clouds lent glory

to the sky as she walked rapidly along the cliff path towards Bournemouth, the sea on her left was scarcely disturbed by a ripple, there could not have been a more peaceful afternoon.

Her faculties seemed too benumbed to allow her yet to realise the difference between her romantic anticipations and the squalid reality; she had expected to traverse that path with Wilmot, who was to have been overcome by gratitude at her spontaneous surrender! She had covered more than half the distance to the Sovereign, her eyes being fixed on the ground, when she came to a sudden halt on hearing her own name. He had stopped immediately in front of her, while a Bath chair on each side made it impossible to walk on without speaking. At these close quarters his disfigurement was extremely painful, and she observed something of that morose expression to which Mrs. Oppenshaw had alluded. For a moment Evangeline felt profoundly thankful that she had paid the visit to the hotel, because if it had not been for her recent experience she might easily have misinterpreted his demeanour as he stood gazing into her face.

"I had no idea you were in Bournemouth," he exclaimed, with unmistakable satisfaction at seeing her again.

"We are here only—only for a day or two," she answered.

"Yourself and Mr. Maitland?"

"Oh yes," she said, with an attempt to steady her voice, "my father is with me."

"Where are you staying?" asked Wilmot.

"At—at the Sovereign," she returned, after a momentary hesitation.

Now that the path was clearer, Evangeline took a step forward, and Wilmot raising his hat, made no attempt to detain her. But as he continued on his way to Boscombe, the Beacon Hotel became the last place on earth that he wished to enter. Before reaching its door, he tried to review his present circumstances, wondering how to get his companion away from the town, without giving up the opportunity of seeing Evangeline day by day. For his desire to see her again had become as ardent as ever, and he wished devoutly that he had accepted Mrs. Oppenshaw's invitation to Green Street.

He realised the fact that Mrs. Oppenshaw, in her eagerness to bring about his marriage, had in all probability seen Evangeline since her return from Southampton, and in this case, Evangeline must have known of his presence at Boscombe before she left London. Was it possible that she had set forth with the object of meeting him?

Wilmot experienced a sense of regret deeper than any he had known before, but as he drew nearer to his hotel he began to take a practical view of the situation. The all-important necessity was to remove every danger of Evangeline's enlightenment.

CHAPTER XXI

EXPLANATIONS

ON reaching the Beacon Hotel, Wilmot Norgate had not long to wait for disillusionment. As he approached the entrance, with no definite plans at present, he was addressed by the waiter who had recently spoken to Evangeline.

"A lady called to see you, sir," cried the man blithely, and the next instant he was considerably startled by the vehemence of Wilmot's oath.

"She — she didn't see Mrs. Norgate?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir," was the answer. "Mrs. Norgate happened to come down in the lift——"

"Did they speak to each other?" exclaimed Wilmot.

"No, sir," said the waiter. "When I mentioned Mrs. Norgate, the lady went away."

With another forcible ejaculation, Wilmot walked back to the gate, simply in order to be alone with his extremely disagreeable reflections. He perceived, naturally, that Evangeline had been

walking away from the Beacon, when he met her on the cliff. She had come to the hotel and learned that he was not staying there alone! He had never felt quite so deeply disgusted with himself and with things in general, as now that he stood outside the garden, convinced of the purpose of Evangeline's visit! She had actually come to offer herself; and at this disastrous moment, it seemed that he had touched the bottom of misfortune. If only he had taken Mrs. Oppenshaw's advice, he would have been in a position to accept this gift from the gods; for perhaps he came now closer to an appreciation of its value than he had ever done before.

But Wilmot was scarcely in a mood for calm reflection. He kicked against his fate, and soon became possessed by a desperate intention to seize his prize even in spite of circumstances. When he realised the strength of the love which alone could induce such a woman to act in such a manner, he told himself that it might endure even the strain of her recent experience. Evangeline had seen too much of London society to imagine that men were all Sir Galahads! Hastening from the gate, Wilmot made his way to Christchurch Road, engaged the first cab he saw, and ordered its driver to the Sovereign Hotel.

Entering the vestibule, he inquired for Mr.

Maitland at the bureau, and was relieved to hear that he had gone to London for the day.

"Kindly send my name to Miss Maitland," said Wilmot; and in answer to the clerk's summons, an impudent-looking page appeared on the scene, took the visiting card, and carried it upstairs to the private sitting-room on the second floor.

Although Evangeline had been at home some time, she was still seated disconsolately by the window, wearing her hat and jacket.

"Come in," she cried in answer to the page's tap at the door, and he crossed the room, holding out the salver towards her, with Wilmot's card.

She scarcely required a moment to form her determination.

"Tell Mr. Norgate I am not at liberty," she said with great promptitude.

"Yes, miss," answered the boy, and the next instant he was racing downstairs to the vestibule, where he at once delivered Evangeline's message.

Wilmot received it with a scowl, but still reluctant to admit total defeat, he took another card from his case, and pencilled a few words. "For God's sake, see me!" he wrote, and asking for an envelope at the bureau, enclosed the card, and saw the page return upstairs.

Now for an instant Evangeline hesitated; not concerning her ultimate conduct, because she felt

there could no longer be the slightest question as far as that was concerned. But although the *denouement* appeared inevitable, there might be a possible doubt as to the nature of the scene on which the curtain should be rung down after this last act of her drama.

It was not in the least a question whether his offence was mortal or venial, although she entertained her own opinion also about that. But it seemed that she had met with absolutely conclusive evidence that Wilmot no longer loved her even according to his own canon of "love." She had put aside all reserve, she had gone to him overflowing with pity and sympathy, and she had been met by—"Mrs. Norgate!" For a moment she hesitated, however, until her antipathy to an emotional interview overcame every other feeling, and she determined never again voluntarily to face Wilmot Norgate.

"Tell Mr. Norgate I will not receive him," said Evangeline, and again the page raced down the wide staircase. He was beginning to enter into the spirit of the thing, and going close to Wilmot, he looked up briskly into his face.

"The lady says she won't see you," he exclaimed, loudly enough for the clerk in the bureau to hear, and upon that Wilmot turned away. But still, he was determined to see Evangeline before regarding

the incident as ended. He declined to allow judgment to go by default, and while he could understand her indignation to-day he tried to persuade himself that to-morrow might find her in a more lenient mood.

Mr. Maitland reached the hotel at seven o'clock that evening, and perhaps he had seldom been more completely astonished than when on entering the sitting-room Evangeline ran towards him and flung her arms about his neck, beseeching him to take her back to London to-morrow ; a request which he was perfectly willing to grant. He insisted on an explanation, however, and perceiving the depth of her humiliation and distress, refrained from any remonstrance concerning her conduct in going to Wilmot's hotel. A telegram was despatched to his butler the same evening, and by three o'clock on Saturday afternoon Evangeline arrived in Portman Square.

On Sunday she seemed to be more low-spirited than Mr. Maitland had seen her even at the time of her transformation last June ; but while he perceived that she suffered deeply, it was impossible to afford her much consolation. She must inevitably endure the struggle alone, and it appeared wise to ignore its cause at the risk of showing a lack of sympathy. On Monday afternoon, Evangeline was alone in the drawing-room, when the door opening, she wished that she had given

instructions that nobody was to be admitted. For a moment she feared lest Owen had heard of her return, whereas she shrank from an interview which could scarcely pass without some kind of explanation. But then Evangeline rose from her chair with an appalled expression as the butler announced "Mr. Norgate."

Wilmot had gone to the Sovereign Hotel on Saturday two hours after Evangeline's departure, and hearing that she had returned to London, he determined to follow her with however forlorn a hope. Apart from the injury to his face, he looked as if he had enjoyed little sleep since she saw him on the cliff between Bournemouth and Boscombe. He made no attempt to offer his hand, whilst Evangeline stood with her head thrown slightly backwards, regarding him in silence as the butler retired and closed the door.

"I suppose I oughtn't to have come after your refusal to see me on Friday," he said.

"It would have been far better not," she answered.

"I couldn't stay away," he exclaimed impetuously. "If I had only dared to imagine that you—that you could still care——"

"Oh, please!" she cried, raising her right hand as if to silence him.

"But you had definitely refused me. I regarded myself as perfectly free——"

"Of course, you were free!" said Evangeline.

"I wonder," he continued, "whether it is possible I can make you understand that—that in spite of—of appearances, I love you as deeply—far more deeply than ever."

"No," she answered rather contemptuously; "it is quite impossible."

"Evangeline," he persisted, "it is useless to pretend any longer that you have forgotten what I was to you."

"I make no pretence," she returned, throwing out her hands impulsively. "I simply decline to discuss it."

"Your actions on Friday were infinitely more expressive than any words can ever be!"

"You remember I declined to see you then," she said. "And you have gained admittance now only because I did not dream you could have the effrontery to come here."

"But," he exclaimed, stepping nearer, "you came to *me*! You knew what had happened to me; our cases seemed to be reversed; you could not keep back your forgiveness any longer. Trusting in my love, you came to me——"

"Never surely was trust more misplaced," murmured Evangeline.

"Your coming," he cried, "proves that you have loved me always."

"If that were true," she retorted, "it would be generous to ignore it."

"I don't pretend to generosity where you are concerned," he insisted. "No man on earth is more niggardly. You can't imagine I shall let you go—after the proof you have given me."

"And after the proof you have given me!" she cried.

"Ah, well," said Wilmot, "of course, I am able to grasp your point of view; but it's a wrong one, and if you will be my wife you shall never have a moment's cause for repentance. Evangeline, think of it!" he urged, drawing closer still. "Imagine our lives together—the misery we shall both have to bear apart——"

To his vexation she interrupted him by walking deliberately towards the bell.

"Then you won't forgive me!" he exclaimed, as she touched the handle.

"It isn't a question of forgiveness," she answered. "You have the audacity to ask me to marry you—there is no fate in the world which I shouldn't consider preferable."

Wilmot's temper was beginning to rise, and shrugging his shoulders, he turned away as the butler entered the room.

"Open the door for Mr. Norgate," said Evan-

geline ; and so, a little ignominiously, Wilmot left her presence.

As he reached the hall, Mr. Maitland emerged from his smoking-room.

"I scarcely expected to see you, Norgate," he exclaimed, while the butler stood decorously apart.

"Can you spare me a few minutes?" asked Wilmot.

"Afraid I can't."

"You must admit," muttered Wilmot, "that my steps are dogged by ill luck."

"The matter is not worth discussion," said Mr. Maitland frigidly. "You will understand that my interest in it is ended."

He stood in the hall while Wilmot left the house, and then went in search of Evangeline, who, however, was locked in her own room. When they next met, she seemed disposed to ignore the interview with Wilmot, but late that night she came to her favourite seat on the arm of her father's chair.

"There's one thing I should be grateful for," she said ; "I want Dr. Fairbank to—to hear what has happened."

"Why on earth——"

"He knew why I was going to Bournemouth," she interrupted. "When he learns that I have

returned he is certain to come here, and I—I don't feel I can see him—not for months, perhaps never. He would require some kind of explanation, and I—I am not equal to it."

Although Mr. Maitland did not enjoy the prospect, he was able on consideration to enter to some degree into Evangeline's feelings, and he could understand that for the present at least she might be disposed to cry "a plague on both your houses!" The following afternoon, he set forth to Saint Martha's Hospital, and being told that Owen was somewhere about the wards, was asked to sit down in his room.

It was nearly half an hour later, and Mr. Maitland was becoming impatient, when Owen entered, with his coat sleeves turned back at the wrists, and bringing with him a pungent odour of chloroform.

"I'm immensely sorry to have kept you," he cried, "but I couldn't possibly come before. So you didn't stay long at Bournemouth," he added, glancing eagerly into Mr. Maitland's face.

"We came home on Saturday," was the answer.

"Am I to offer you my congratulations?" asked Owen, turning down his cuffs, and appearing to be absorbed in the operation.

"Well, that is a matter of opinion," said Mr. Maitland quietly.

"Miss Maitland is not——"

"I am going to be perfectly candid with you," Mr. Maitland interrupted. "Evangeline asked me to take her to Bournemouth expressly because Norgate happened to be in the neighbourhood."

"That I understood," said Owen.

"During my absence in London on Friday," Mr. Maitland continued, "she went to his hotel. He was out at the time, but she discovered that he was not staying there alone."

"A woman?" asked Owen.

"Yes; I don't care to dwell upon the wretched business. Evangeline refused to see Norgate when he came to our place the same evening, but he found her at home yesterday at Portman Square."

"Then that finished the incident," suggested Owen, with a sense of intense relief.

"Heaven only knows!" was the answer. "I told you I meant to be quite candid. Of course it was a terrible disillusionment for Evangeline. At present she is consumed by indignation, but as to what the future may bring forth, I don't feel that I know well enough to prophesy."

"But surely——"

"My dear fellow," said Mr. Maitland, "we will leave it there, except that I have to tell you that Evangeline is rather keen on her own society just now. A word to the wise, you know! I shall

get her away later on, and by and by I hope that you and I may run up against each other again."

Perceiving that Mr. Maitland had come to the hospital expressly to warn him off, Owen derived only a mitigated satisfaction from the fact of Norgate's dismissal. That Evangeline had instigated her father's visit, could scarcely be doubted, while her object appeared perfectly plain. She wished to prevent Owen from imagining that he stood to gain by Wilmot's loss, and indeed it was obvious that she would have re-plighted her troth if circumstances had proved less unfavourable.

Nevertheless, Owen was entirely unable to agree with Mr. Maitland concerning the possibility of another reconciliation. Whilst he knew that women are forgiving, and that Time works wonders, he could not imagine that, in the face of her recent disillusioning, Evangeline would ever think tolerantly of Norgate in the days to come. So that although it was henceforth impossible for Owen to go to Portman Square without a special invitation, he yet strove to fix his thoughts on the future—a somewhat dim and distant future, it is true. In the meantime, he threw himself with renewed ardour into his work, until about a fortnight later he received a brief note requesting him to come to

Sir Eustace Carstairs' house in Harley Street after dinner the same evening.

Sir Eustace Carstairs, the Senior Consulting Surgeon at Saint Martha's, had long shown the friendliest interest in his former pupil. He had lately proffered his services to the Government, who had promptly accepted his offer to go to South Africa, whither he had arranged to sail in a few days' time.

Only yesterday Sir Eustace had made close and unexpected inquiries concerning Owen's health, going as far as to overhaul him at the hospital. The hopes which the invitation to Harley Street awakened were not doomed to disappointment, and Owen eagerly seized upon the suggestion that he should accompany Sir Eustace to Cape Town. But although the prospect of a voyage suited his present humour, not even the necessarily hurried preparations could distract his thoughts from one urgent problem. Would it be possible to intrude on Evangeline before his departure? Or, as the result of Mr. Maitland's visit, was it inevitable that he should leave England without bidding her farewell? Owen's mind wavered betwixt "yes" and "no." He continued to hesitate until Monday, but as he was to embark at Southampton at one o'clock on Wednesday, there obviously remained little time to spare. Having left the matter

undetermined until six o'clock on Monday evening, he then sat down and wrote a few lines to Evangeline; explaining that he was on the point of leaving for South Africa with Sir Eustace (of whose journey she had doubtless read in the daily newspapers), and asking whether he might come to see her for five minutes before his departure.

Having addressed the letter, Owen sent it to Portman Square by one of the hospital porters in a hansom, with instructions to await an answer. The only answer which he received, however, after an hour's suspense, was to the effect that Miss Maitland would not be home until late that night. As a matter of fact, Mr. Maitland had insisted on taking her to dine at a restaurant, and afterwards to the theatre, so that Evangeline did not receive the letter until her return to Portman Square at half-past eleven. Breaking the seal with not a little surprise, she read the contents twice before passing the letter to her father.

"Well?" he asked, gazing into Evangeline's face.

"I—I scarcely know what to say," she murmured.

"Anyhow," urged Mr. Maitland, "it will be his last opportunity of troubling you for some time."

"I need not decide to-night," she cried; but when she reached her own room, and had dismissed her

maid, she sat down in an arm-chair as if she were bent on arriving at a decision before she slept.

Her impulse was to let Owen come! She disliked his leaving England without a word to wish him "God-speed!" Still she feared lest he might amplify her permission into encouragement, whereas Evangeline was determined that no consideration whatsoever should induce her as long as she lived to encourage any man again. She revolted from the slightest suggestion of marriage; feeling utterly weary of the topic, her chief desire was to be let alone, in the hope of steadying herself after the recent catastrophe.

She lay down in the small hours, still without having made up her mind about what appeared to be an extremely simple matter, but happily for Owen, Tuesday proved to be a bright morning; although it would have annoyed Evangeline if Mr. Maitland had hinted that her decision could be due in the least degree to the weather. Yet the sunshine which streamed into her room as she dressed probably served to turn the scale. It could not fail to make her take a more favourable view of things in general, and as Owen happened to be foremost in her mind, her thoughts flew back to Trimingsley and to other sunny days, which had been pleasantly shared with him.

"Well," cried Mr. Maitland, as she bade him

"good morning" on reaching the dining-room, "what about Fairbank?"

"I think it would look a little ungracious to say he mustn't come," was the answer.

"In that case, the best plan will be to send the fellow a telegram," said her father. "You will find some forms in my room."

After yet a few moments' apparent hesitation, Evangeline went into the smoking-room, sat down at the table, foraged in the somewhat disorderly paper-stand for a telegraph form, and having succeeded in finding one, she seemed to forget that Mr. Maitland was waiting for her to pour out his coffee, as she sat gazing at the blank slip of paper.

With sudden inspiration, she took up a pen.

"Come at four to-day," she wrote, and at once sent a servant to the post-office.

CHAPTER XXII

OWEN GOES AWAY

OWEN set forth from the hospital with the intention to avoid anything of the nature of sentiment during his interview with Evangeline, although the occasion might perhaps excuse a slight tendency in this direction, and whilst the sight of her saddened face almost overcame his determination, he succeeded in greeting her as if he really felt in the highest spirits.

"You see I have come for another farewell!" he cried, as their hands touched.

"No popular tenor could have more!" she returned, quite prepared to second his efforts. "How long," she added, "are you likely to be away?"

"It depends to some extent on the duration of the war," he explained. "Anyhow I am scarcely a free agent. I am at the disposal of Sir Eustace, you understand."

"You feel pleased to go?" she asked.

"One naturally likes to have a finger in the pie,"

said Owen; and then for some reason a kind of embarrassment fell upon them both, and for a few moments neither spoke. "I hope," he continued, "that you will remove your prohibition——"

"I may do that safely as you are going away to-morrow."

"But after my return—I should like to think you will be the first person I shall see!"

"It would be rash to commit yourself," answered Evangeline, inclined to be sceptical about all mankind.

With a smile, Owen put the subject aside, remembering the warning which he had administered to himself before leaving the hospital.

"I want you to try to remember me as—askindly as you can while I am absent," he said, becoming reckless again the next instant.

"Don't you think," asked Evangeline, "that it is comparatively easy to remember people kindly—while they're absent?"

"I think it's the easiest thing in the world to be cynical," he cried. "You know," he persisted, leaning forward in his familiar, friendly way, "I shouldn't let myself go in for that kind of thing. I shan't be here to give you good advice," he added, with a laugh.

"You think I require it?"

"Oh well, that doesn't follow. For my own

part," he said, "I intend to conjure up all the pleasantest reminiscences."

"One can't make bricks without straw," murmured Evangeline.

"There will always be the recollection of those weeks at Trimingsley," he continued. "I shall never feel the sea breeze without thinking of them." Again he remembered his determination to put a curb on his tongue. "I suppose your season is just beginning," he suggested.

"It will not make much difference to me," she answered. "I shall not go out very much."

"You ought to go here, there, and everywhere," he urged.

"Your precept doesn't agree with your example."

"Well, I have always had a good deal to do, and I am not certain I care for that kind of thing."

"I am not certain I care for it either," said Evangeline.

"Sudden conversions make one rather sceptical," he returned. "And the medical point of view insists on being obtrusive. You need all the change you can get. I feel I shall stay here wasting your time all day," he broke off abruptly.

"You—you must have a great deal to do," she remarked, as he rose from his chair.

"I can't help feeling a little anxious," he said.

"About what?"

"Your welfare while I am away," he answered. "Of course, I am perfectly well aware that I ought to consume my own smoke, but that becomes rather difficult now and then. I should like to see you on the right road——"

"To where?" asked Evangeline.

Owen shrugged his shoulders.

"You have a tendency to take a jaundiced view of the world," he said. "But that kind of thing doesn't answer. Now," he continued, bending towards her, "promise me to do your best to look at the bright side. You understand how it is sometimes: one ends the day with a profound conviction that life isn't worth living; everything seems tangled, and it won't unravel anyhow. But there are a thousand chances to one that the morning will show you a way out. Of course it is very commonplace," he added, "but one is compelled to fly to simple, old-fashioned remedies sometimes."

"Still," cried Evangeline, "the night seems rather long and dark, now and then."

"Ah yes," he said, "but try to be a brave little woman, and don't be frightened at bogies. Now, will you promise me?"

"I hate to make promises," she murmured.

"Well, anyhow, I hope you will try to remember my sage advice!"

"You really sail to-morrow?" she said.

"At one o'clock to-morrow," he answered.

"And now I suppose I must say good-bye. Always a detestable word, isn't it?"

"Of course, I can't say it is pleasant," she cried, forcing a smile.

"And in the present case," said Owen, "it is worse because I leave you bothered and low-spirited"; but now Evangeline looked up into his face.

"You mustn't fret about me," she answered quietly. "I promise that I will try to—to follow your advice."

"And you forgive my coming in the face of your prohibition?"

"I am glad you came," she exclaimed. "I feel you have helped me."

Owen looked so radiant that she began to regret her words as soon as they were spoken, but he was holding out his right hand, and Evangeline placed hers within it.

"God bless you, Evangeline," he muttered, more emotionally than he had intended.

"Good-bye——"

He looked down entreatingly into her face, and

she understood what he wished her to say. Still she hardened her heart.

"Good-bye, Dr. Fairbank," she continued, and pressing her hand firmly for an instant, Owen turned towards the door. As he passed out of the room, he glanced back with a smile as if he were determined to leave a cheerful impression behind him, and indeed, once more Evangeline felt that his visit had put fresh heart into her. As he went downstairs, she realised that she had parted from a beloved friend, but whether or not Owen could ever become more than a friend she could not tell.

At the least she remembered his advice, and during the ensuing weeks she struggled to show a braver face than she had done since her return from Bournemouth. Perhaps her most painful experience was an interview with Mrs. Oppenshaw, who had evidently received some kind of explanation from Wilmot Norgate, whom she still, in a way, showed a desire to defend. But Evangeline quite lost her temper that afternoon, and Mrs. Oppenshaw left the house with a determination not to re-enter it for some time to come. Evangeline, however, learned during the interview that Wilmot had left England—alone, Mrs. Oppenshaw significantly stated, and during the second week of June Mr. Maitland also suggested a journey abroad. For three months they remained absent

from home, visiting many continental cities at a time when their countrymen were not invariably welcome guests. During these months Mr. Maitland spared no effort to distract Evangeline's thoughts from Wilmot, and sometimes he seized the opportunity to remind her of Owen—usually when he read Sir Eustace's name in the newspapers.

Not that Evangeline required any reminder of the kind. His absence left a blank in her life, and especially after her return to Portman Square early in October, she began to look forward to the time when Owen might re-enter it. But nothing occurred to lead her to expect his imminent return, until one morning in February Mr. Maitland looked up from his newspaper at breakfast-time, with the remark that Carstairs had embarked at Cape Town.

"Was Owen with him?" asked Evangeline, taken off her guard, so that Mr. Maitland heard Fairbank's Christian name on her lips for the first time.

"He isn't mentioned," was the answer. "But as Carstairs took him out I imagine he will bring him home again."

Never doubting that this would be the case, Evangeline began to study the Shipping Intelligence, trying to trace the course of the vessel which

was bringing Sir Eustace to England, until at last, one afternoon in March, Mr. Maitland came from his club with the news that Carstairs had landed that morning at Southampton.

Remembering that Owen had insisted she should be the first person he came to see after his return, Evangeline now looked for him at any hour, nor would it in the least have surprised her to receive a visit from Owen that evening. When bedtime came with no sign of him, she grew disappointed, inasmuch as he had failed to hasten to her side, and she asked herself whether absence had cooled his ardour also.

She had felt confident that Owen would allow very little time to elapse before he asked her to become his wife, and she had persuaded herself, at the least, that her highest happiness lay in his direction. But yet, she could not put aside a kind of nervous distrust of herself. Once before she had believed that her regard for Wilmot was dead, until his departure for South Africa, his wound, and especially the nature of the injury, had awakened her former emotion. And while she assured herself again and again that no earthly consideration could possibly induce her to marry him, there were moments when she tormented herself by the fear that he might still retain his unwelcome influence in her own despite. For she was entirely unable

to belittle the past, and whatever Wilmot had done, however short of her ideal he had fallen, the fact remained that she had loved him with sufficient devotion to undertake that mad journey to Boscombe.

The next day passed, and the next, without the expected visit from Owen, and then Mr. Maitland surprised Evangeline by the information that he had been to the hospital.

"I felt curious to learn what had become of Fairbank," he exclaimed, "so I went to St. Martha's to inquire whether he had returned with Carstairs."

"Hasn't he?" asked Evangeline.

"All I could ascertain," said her father, "was that Carstairs had left Fairbank behind, and that nobody knew when to expect to see him again."

This information proved to be a consolation in its way, and Evangeline began to blame herself for lack of faith. But as the weeks went by, if it was foolish to doubt Owen, she sometimes questioned the benignity of fate.

"She who will not when she may,
When she will, she shall have nay!"

Superstition, which always played a more or less important part in her affairs, as it does in those of many women and of not a few men, gave rise to various unhappy imaginings; and when Evangeline looked backwards over the past year or two,

her life seemed like a tale that is told, and she frequently doubted whether it might be destined to end happily.

In the beginning of May, she received, amongst others, an invitation to a small and early dance at the house of Mrs. Ravenhurst in Kensington Gore. Now, Mrs. Ravenshurst was related in a round-about way to Mrs. Oppenshaw, and if Wilmot Norgate happened to be in London there would be every probability of meeting him. As to whether he was in London or even in England, Evangeline had no means of knowing, for although Mrs. Oppenshaw had told her that he had gone abroad, that was many months ago, and Wilmot was not likely to absent himself from London for ever.

"I suppose you won't dream of going," said Mr. Maitland, somewhat anxiously, when Evangeline showed him the card.

"I—I haven't quite decided," she returned.

"Forewarned is forearmed, you know," he insisted. "There are a hundred chances to one you will meet Norgate. I passed him in Pall Mall last week, and if he hadn't nodded, I question whether I should have recognised him."

Observing her sympathetic expression at his reference to Wilmot's disfigurement, Mr. Maitland began to hope more fervently than ever that she would decline Mrs. Ravenhurst's invitation, but in

fact Evangeline's impulse to refuse ultimately caused her to accept it. If there were actually any danger in meeting Wilmot after all that had passed, the sooner she placed the matter beyond doubt the better for herself and for Owen. As the evening drew near, she tried to convince herself that the danger was purely imaginative; that she was influenced only by the memory of a love which could never be revived.

As usual, Evangeline went upstairs after dinner for a few finishing touches to be added to her toilette, and when she returned to Mr. Maitland, dressed entirely in white, her long cloak unfastened, he thought that she had never looked more radiantly beautiful.

"What time do you expect to be home?" he asked.

"I shall not be later than half-past twelve," she answered.

"You will find me sitting up," said Mr. Maitland, and he could not help feeling a little apprehension as she kissed him and said "good-bye."

Notwithstanding a certain amount of confidence in her own strength, during the drive to Kensington Evangeline could not shake off a sensation of nervousness. Her whole life, since that last interview with Wilmot, seemed to have been a preparation for the imminent test. During the

intervening year, she had been as passive as when she waited and hoped for the raising of that other spell which had been cast upon her. Now, as then, she longed to find that she had outgrown something ugly and disfiguring—for as such she had, since her visit to the hotel at Boscombe, regarded her affection for Wilmot. But, having been deceived in herself before, Evangeline felt afraid to take anything for granted now, until she had undergone the ordeal of coming again face to face with Norgate.

A glance around the already crowded ballroom convinced her that he had not yet arrived, and wondering whether she should find the desired opportunity to-night after all, Evangeline was dancing her third waltz, when she became aware of his presence. As she continued to talk to her partner, she experienced something approaching a desire to feel her own pulse, in order to determine whether or not it had quickened; but at the least, she was entirely unable to avoid a feeling of compassion as her eyes rested on Wilmot's altered face.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RETURN OF OWEN

MR. MAITLAND told the butler that he should himself sit up until Evangeline's return, and that the servants might all go to bed when they pleased. Remembering her impulsive conduct at Bournemouth, he felt too anxious to think of sleep until he heard how she had endured the ordeal of another encounter with Norgate. Mr. Maitland lighted a cigar, and sat down in his usual chair in the smoking-room very ill at ease, warning himself that he must not, indeed, be very much surprised if she should return with the announcement that Wilmot had been reinstated.

Yet he had not attempted to reason with Evangeline during the last few days, being convinced that nothing he could say would have the remotest effect on the issue. In spite of what had occurred concerning "Mrs. Norgate," he still dreaded an impulsive, emotional surrender, to be followed by years of regret.

With thoughts of this melancholy description,

Mr. Maitland sat alone until the clock struck a quarter to ten, when he heard the bell ring, and a minute afterwards the butler opened the door of the smoking-room.

"Dr. Fairbank!" he announced, and as Mr. Maitland rose hastily from his chair, Owen crossed the threshold—brisk, alert, vigorous as ever.

"When did you arrive?" cried Mr. Maitland, as they gripped hands.

"I reached London half an hour ago," answered Owen, glancing down deprecatingly at his rough tweed suit. "Is Miss Maitland quite well?" he added.

"Oh dear, yes. But I am sorry to say she is out—gone to a dance at Kensington."

With a disappointed expression, Owen followed his example and sat down; cigars were lighted, and they began to discuss South African affairs, the prospects of an early settlement, the concentration camps, and the general conduct of the campaign. Fresh from the scene of active operations, Owen proved to be an interesting companion, and Mr. Maitland soon forgot Evangeline and the passing time. But hearing the butler in the hall at about half-past eleven, he rose, with a few words of apology to Owen, and left the room to say that the visitor's presence need not affect his previous instructions.

"I will let Dr. Fairbank out," he added. On returning to the smoking-room, he explained that he had promised to sit up for Evangeline.

"Is she likely to be very late?" asked Owen with obvious eagerness.

"About half-past twelve."

For a moment Owen looked reflectively at the tip of his cigar.

"I daresay," he exclaimed, glancing suddenly into Mr. Maitland's face, "you can understand why I lost no time in coming here!"

"Oh well," said Mr. Maitland, rather gravely, "your motives have always been perfectly transparent."

"I have never attempted to disguise them from Evangeline," was the answer.

"From what I gather," Mr. Maitland continued, "she has shown a rather curious and, perhaps, a misleading frankness in response."

"Still," said Owen, "I have always gone to work with my eyes open, only as Norgate seemed to be finally disposed of before I left England——"

"I warned you not to count your chicks!" cried Mr. Maitland.

"I confess," answered Owen, "I scarcely thought a warning necessary. Has anything happened to justify it?" he asked, rising from his chair.

"Until to-night, I should have said 'no.'"

"What has occurred to-night?"

"Evangeline had neither seen nor heard of Norgate," Mr. Maitland explained. "But ten chances to one she has met him at this dance."

With a gloomy expression Owen returned to his chair.

"She went, knowing that Norgate would be there?" he suggested.

"Yes," was the answer.

Owen had returned to England with hopes running high, but now they fell again to zero. After a somewhat long silence, he looked at his watch and muttered something about going.

"If you wish to stay until Evangeline comes home," said Mr. Maitland, "there is no reason why you shouldn't. At the least I can promise she will be pleased to see you again."

Owen laughed rather grimly.

"A stone when one hungers for bread," he answered.

With every passing minute, his impatience and anxiety gathered strength. Now and then he answered some question of Mr. Maitland's, now and then he looked at his watch. At last the clock in the hall struck twelve, and his host could scarcely repress a yawn.

"Another half hour or so," he cried, "and Evangeline will be here."

Another half hour or so, thought Owen, and I shall know my fate! For he assured himself that a single glance at her face would be sufficient.

In the meanwhile, Evangeline had been undergoing her self-imposed test. Wilmot came towards her without any woe-begone air, and nobody would have suspected from his demeanour what had passed between them. While she experienced nothing of the nature of repugnance, her face grew more grave as he approached, so that she found it hard to force a conventional smile when he stopped before her chair.

"It seems a long time since we met," he remarked.

"Twelve months or longer," she answered.

"Is Mr. Maitland quite well?"

"Oh yes, thank you, he is very well indeed."

Wilmot bent a little lower.

"May I ask you for a dance?" he said, and for a moment Evangeline hesitated. Not that she felt either a desire or an objection to dance with him; her indifference, now that it came to the point, seemed to be complete, and even a little surprising to herself. Nevertheless she deemed it more judicious to refuse.

"I am afraid I haven't one to spare," she returned, and without the slightest change of expression, Wilmot bowed, remarked upon the

warmth of the room, and walked slowly away—not, Evangeline thought, without a certain dignity.

Now she began to long for the time to set forth home, feeling impatient to be alone in the carriage in order that she might exult over her victory—for as such she regarded it. The change in her own feelings, combined with the alteration in his appearance, made it difficult to realise their former relationship, and during the drive to Portman Square, Evangeline came to the conclusion that she might now look forward to Owen's return without the slightest reservation.

She longed for his home-coming as she had never permitted herself to long for it before, wishing he could read her heart this evening, and wondering whether it could be possible for one person's feelings to influence another's at a distance! She tried to imagine where he was at that particular moment, little dreaming that he was anxiously awaiting her in Mr. Maitland's smoking-room; picturing him rather in some hospital at Bloemfontein or elsewhere, running all manner of risks with his usual courageous cheerfulness.

Covering her face with her hands, Evangeline prayed for his safe return, while her heart went out to him as she had believed it could never go out to any man again. When she looked through the carriage window, close to Portman Square, she

passed her handkerchief over her eyes ; then the horse stopped at the door, the coachman alighted to ring the bell, and a few moments later she was admitted by Mr. Maitland.

"Have—have you had a good time?" he asked, with an unusual tremor in his voice, and a sharp glance at her face.

Owen, waiting to learn his fate within the room, could hear the answer.

"Oh yes, pretty well," she cried ; and the next instant she added, "Wilmot was there!"

"Did you dance with him?"

"No," said Evangeline ; "I thought it would be better not"; and unfastening her cloak, as Mr. Maitland put up the chain, she walked along the hall towards the open door of the smoking-room. On reaching the threshold Evangeline came to an abrupt standstill.

"Owen!" she exclaimed joyously. "Owen!" And as she advanced to meet him, with both hands eagerly outstretched, her face told Owen all that he wished to know.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE		PAGE
GENERAL LITERATURE, . . .	8-22	LEADERS OF RELIGION, . . .	26
METHUEN'S STANDARD LIBRARY, . . .	22	SOCIAL QUESTIONS OF TO-DAY, . . .	27
BYZANTINE TEXTS, . . .	23	UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERIES, . . .	27
LITTLE LIBRARY, . . .	23	COMMERCIAL SERIES, . . .	27
LITTLE GUIDES, . . .	23	CLASSICAL TRANSLATIONS, . . .	28
LITTLE BIOGRAPHIES, . . .	24	METHUEN'S JUNIOR SCHOOL-BOOKS, . . .	28
LITTLE BLUE BOOKS . . .	24	SCHOOL EXAMINATION SERIES, . . .	28
ILLUSTRATED POCKET LIBRARY OF		JUNIOR EXAMINATION SERIES, . . .	28
FLAIN AND COLOURED BOOKS, . . .	24	TEXTBOOKS OF TECHNOLOGY, . . .	28
LIBRARY OF DEVOTION, . . .	25	FICTION, . . .	29-37
WESTMINSTER COMMENTARIES, . . .	25	THE FLEUR DE LIS NOVELS, . . .	37
HANDBOOKS OF THEOLOGY, . . .	26	BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS, . . .	38
CHURCHMAN'S LIBRARY, . . .	26	THE NOVELIST, . . .	38
CHURCHMAN'S BIBLE, . . .	26	METHUEN'S SIXPENNY LIBRARY, . . .	38

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